

Holiness Then and Now

Deuteronomy 14:1-21

Do you know what a holiness bun is? A couple generations ago, particularly in Pentecostal Holiness circles, it was the bun that a godly woman was supposed to use to tie up her long hair. So picture in your mind the old fashioned image of a woman with her hair twisted neatly and tightly into a rather rather large bun on the top of her head. The holiness bun.

But is any particular hairstyle really the definition of holiness? Or any other clothing style? The answer has to be an emphatic “no.” Christianity does not have a uniform. Uniforms are appropriate in the military, for obvious reasons. And we want our policemen to wear uniforms. And, of course, UPS and FedEx drivers need uniforms too! But the Jesus’ church doesn’t have a uniform. And God doesn’t require any uniform. We don’t all have to look alike or dress alike, and while social custom is often important, our culture does not and cannot define what holiness is all about.

The point is, nothing merely outward and external can define true holiness. God makes that abundantly clear with reference to the selection of David as king in Israel, a choice which required the nominations of David’s older brothers as king to be rejected.

1 Sam. 16:7 “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

That’s a really important principle. Holiness, then is a matter of the heart, not of the outward appearance. Holiness is a matter of the inner man, not a matter of clothing or jewelry. Or hair. And so we read words addressed specifically to women, but applying

likewise to men, about what really matters in terms of beauty.

1 Peter 3:3 “Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

So the hidden person of the heart is where holiness is to be found, and defined. But what about our text this morning from Deuteronomy 14? It is similar to what we find in Leviticus 11-15. The subject is holiness, according to verse 2, “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God.” But what we read about are animals that are clean or unclean, animals you are permitted to eat and animals you are forbidden to eat. Just to read some of the verses,

v.4-8

So what’s the point? I hope I have your attention with that question. Let me begin this morning by defining the overall principle,

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS.

v.1-2

You might already the root meaning of holiness, which is to be set apart. It is the same root word sometimes translated “sanctification.” Set apart, distinct, separated. And before we get to any specific definitions or applications, the broad principle of holiness is that Christians are,

A. People separated from the world in order to belong to God.

Separated from the world. Identifiably separated. Distinctly different. And the overriding principle is that we are identified as belonging to God.

v.2 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God.”

To get ahead of myself a little bit, that’s why these animal distinctions were so important in the Old Testament, because that was the appropriate external evidence of this separation. What you ate was a way to identify to whom you belonged.

Lev. 20:23 “And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. 24 But I have said to you, “You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. 26 And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

Let me stress, so you understand clearly, holiness means being separated out from one group in order to be identified with another group. So if you are rooting for Clemson tomorrow night in the college football championship, you will likely be wearing a lot of orange. If you wear purple, it’s LSU. And if you support President Trump, you might likely be seen wearing a red hat with the initials MAGA on it. Separated and identified as belonging to one group, or another. That’s the basic idea of holiness. One way to do that is by outward appearance.

Yet, in the context of our faith, it’s not a matter of outward appearance at all. Holiness means that means we belong to God.

2 Cor. 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with

unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.” 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.”

So that’s the overall picture of what holiness means. People separated from the world in order to belong to God. And there is more to it. A personal connection. An intimately personal connection. It is like me saying that my three daughters are separated from all the other people in the world because they are my daughters and I love them dearly. I can certainly love other children, but my love for my own daughters is special. And that’s the point here with regard to the principle of holiness. Christians are not simply separated from the world, but they are,

B. People chosen by God to be his own special treasure.

This sort of language is used often in Scripture. Here in our text, we are identified as “the children of the Lord your God” in verse 1. Then, more fully,

v.2

We read the same description when Israel was delivered out of the slavery of Egypt,

Ex. 19:4 “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now

therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

And we see this very language in the New Testament letter from Peter

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

The language of special people refers to our identity, that God takes us to be his own possession. Special, distinct and personal, above all the other peoples and nations of the world. God takes us. In fact, God chose us, again in verse 2. In the language of,

Eph. 1:4 “...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Do you see how these ideas all fit together. He chose us, in love he predestined us. That we should be holy, separated from the world by the choice of God’s own love, by the love of God’s own choice. That’s who we are as Christians. People chosen by God to be his own special treasure. In other words, holy.

Now, let’s look at the details. First, in the context of the Old

Covenant, and then now in the New Covenant. So first,

II. HOLINESS THEN.

Then, in the time of Moses, when he wrote Deuteronomy. v.1

Ok, what does that mean? My best understanding, using the wisdom of multiple commentaries, is that the cutting and shaving were funeral customs of the people of Canaan. In other words, pagan rituals for mourning the dead. And typically, that mourning for the dead would involve ancestor worship. Worshiping the dead. That’s what the unbelieving pagans did. Instead of worshiping God, they worshipped their dead ancestors, by cutting themselves and shaving the front of their head.

And God says “no.”

A. Holiness and mourning for the dead.

So to be holy, to be set apart as God’s people, you would not participate in the worship of the dead. You would not mourn for the dead with the same practices as those who worshipped their own pagan gods.

There are some important thoughts there. The dead don’t become angels, they don’t become objects of worship or intercession. Only God is worthy of that, and the dead among mankind are actually giving obvious testimony of the nature of man in general. We are mortal, corruptible creatures, not worthy to be worshipped at all! We are just men. Just people. And when we die, our bodies go the ground and decay. Nothing in that worthy of worship or veneration.

Then we read multiple verses about clean and unclean animals, with specific reference to food.

B. Holiness and unclean food.

This is a rather long list of animals that the people of Israel were permitted and not-permitted to eat, found in verses 3-21. Very specific. So the question is, why? Some people make note of a variety of health benefits to these restrictions, though that isn't the extent of the reasoning for all these distinctions to be defined by Scripture. There is a much more significant spiritual reasoning, connected to this whole concept of holiness. It was the food restrictions, along with all the other ceremonial laws, that demonstrated that the people of the nation of Israel were indeed set apart from all the other nations of the world.

In the big picture of Leviticus, this is the importance of all these regulations of separations. They were a constant reminder to the people of Israel that they were separated unto God. Think about it. Every time they ate, their separation as the people of God was made obvious and evident. They could only eat certain animals. Every time they went to worship, their separation as the people of God was made clear, with the requirements of all those sacrifices.

In all the daily affairs of life, in all their social interactions, even as they travelled, they were made constantly aware of their status before God. They were a separate people, a holy nation among all the other nations of the world. And so, in the external forms of the Old Covenant, we read of the duty of God's people,

Lev. 10:10 "...that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean."

Also, Lev. 11:44 "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 45 For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be

holy, for I am holy."

The principle is separation from the world, and then, in that day, that separation was demonstrated by all these ceremonial regulations that outwardly defined that separation. But what about now? What do we do with this passage now? In our day? As we study Deuteronomy 14, what can we say about,

III. HOLINESS NOW.

First of all, I want to say it plainly and clearly.

A. Ceremonial food regulations have been ended.

Acts 10:9 "The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 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."

Similarly, Acts 11:1 "Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" 4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four

corners; and it came to me. 6 When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' 9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10 Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven."

So now, in the advancement of God's revelation in the New Covenant, we are no longer bound by these regulations. And there is a reason for that, in terms of understanding the work of the gospel now in this age. Then, in that age, in the Old Testament, Israel as a nation was to be separate. God's people were identified outwardly, externally, by the singular nation. To belong to God was to be a citizen of the nation of Israel, and that outward identity was prominent then. But now, with the coming of Jesus, in this age, there is a very important change.

B. The invitation of the gospel is given to people of all nations.

So, to be holy, to be part of the holy people of God, you didn't have to identify yourself with one nation. Those external regulations were removed. Nation by nation, there were no longer clean and unclean people. And so the lesson that God is teaching Peter is not simply that he can eat whatever meat he wants to, that no food is unclean. But that he can proclaim the gospel to anybody, to everybody, to every nation. And, thus, as represented by the foods, there are no nations that are unclean. Thus the gospel is for every nation.

Acts 10:28 Then [Peter] said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

That was the point! That was the lesson. "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

So when it came to the rituals of Jewishness, the Gentiles no longer were subject to those laws, including circumcision. For salvation is entirely and totally a work of God's grace and is received by faith alone. Thus in the council of Jerusalem, this was determined,

Acts 15:7 "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, 9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."

There is no Jew nor Gentile. There are no outward distinctions among men. That's the gospel.

Gal. 3:26 "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Therefore, holiness is no longer a matter of what you eat.

C. Holiness has reference to our conduct.

I read 1 Peter 2 earlier, on the definition of God's people, chosen to be his own special people. I'll continue in that chapter,

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have

obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Do you see the connection! Likewise

1 Peter 1:13 “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 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.”

“Be holy in all your conduct.” That’s the application of all of this for today. That same connection is found in,

2 Cor. 6:17 “Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.” 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.”

Holiness has reference to your conduct. But there is still one more crucial point, with our focus still on Deuteronomy 14, and all of the Old Testament ceremonial laws that defined holiness then. There was a reason for those regulations then, and that reason was to point us to Jesus. Because,

D. Jesus fulfills and embodies the ceremonial holiness of the Old Testament.

The reason those ceremonial laws are ended is that Jesus

has arrived. And we have Jesus. We don’t need ceremonial references to him. We now have the real thing. And what is described in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy, is of benefit for us because it enables us to see just how perfectly Jesus was holy. And just how perfectly he has accomplished for us what all of those holiness regulations and sacrifices could only imply. Jesus fulfills them, as they provide the foundation and explanations for what Jesus had to do and why.

Let me end with a lengthy passage from,

Heb. 9:1 “Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not

made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

So when you read about all these Old Testament regulations that define holiness, realize that Jesus fulfill not only the external duty and obligation of the law, but he offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins. And he himself cleanses us from the guilt and pollution of our sins. So now, by faith, you can approach our great God in worship and understand,

v.2 “[that] 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.”

Therefore,

1 Peter 1:15 “...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.”