

The Stewardship of All

Deuteronomy 14:1-29

Scripture Focus

Deuteronomy 14:1-29

Key Verse

Deuteronomy 14:2

TDM Competency:

Live Biblically: Understand and apply biblical principles to all areas of life.

Overview

God directed His people to micromanage their hearts by examining every detail of life. Focusing stewardship all the way down to the very food they could or could not eat, God demonstrated that He was Lord over all and was to be worshipped and obeyed in every little detail of life.

Theme

God is to be honored in every detail of life through the stewardship of all that has been entrusted to us.

Desired Learner Response [Aiming at the Heart for Life Transformation] To examine their hearts to see if they are honoring the Lord as wise stewards; To understand that a tithe is not a legalistic offering of money, but rather an specific act of worship to which God calls all believers; To repent of either not tithing or tithing out of a motive of anything other than honoring God.

Outline

- I. Obvious Stewardship (vv. 1-2)
- II. Appetite Stewardship (vv. 3-21)
- III. Investment Stewardship (vv. 22-29)

Stewardship Dictionary: The following four terms must be clearly defined in order to accurately communicate this TDM Stewardship series. Many definitions for these terms exist, but the definitions provided below are intended whenever the four words are used in this series. The pastor will also use the definitions for each word as he preaches. Take time to make your class very familiar with these terms and definitions.

Generosity: Eagerly giving myself to others for God's glory.

Stewardship: Utilizing all God has entrusted to me, in accord with God's Word, and for His glory.

Tithe: Returning 10% of my monetary increase to God, through my church, as an expression of worship.

Offering: The expression of a generous heart, beyond the tithe.

Points of Interest

Following are some statistics you might find helpful:¹

- Giving to charitable causes is the same for non-Christians as Christians.
- There has been a 26-year decline in the percentage of Christian giving. It is now between 1.5 to 3.5 percent of the income depending upon the denomination.
- Eighty to 95 percent of Christians do not give 10 percent or more.
- Thirty to 50 percent of persons attending church have blank giving records.
- Eighty percent of church receipts are given by persons 55 years of age and older.
- Seventeen to 18 percent of church membership gives 80 percent of the money. This has declined from 20 percent in the past 12 years.

I. **Obvious Stewardship (vv. 1-2)**

- A. “children of the LORD your God” – Since we belong to God, we are to practice wise stewardship of all that we are and possess so that it is obvious to all that see we belong to God. Recognizing Israel fully belonged to God shines a light on the entire chapter. The reason for the commands of what to avoid and what to participate in took root in the purpose of God’s people, namely to honor Him. To be God’s people requires a lifestyle that is reflective of His character and nature. God’s people are called His treasured possession, which highlights His choosing them to be His own. Our salvation distinguishes us from the rest of the world.
- B. “cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head” – Cutting the flesh or shaving the front of their heads was a typical practice of Canaanites, and for that reason it was to be avoided. The Canaanites practiced this type of self-mutilation at the death of a loved one. Such a practice was a demonstration of hopeless grieving. The children of God were to avoid even the appearance of hopelessness in the face of death for their God was the God of life. Apparently, some of the children of God were practicing cutting of their flesh during times of grief, thus erroneously identifying themselves with pagans.
- C. “For” – The purpose they were to avoid pagan practices was that they were called to be a holy people, a people separated from sin.
- D. “holy” – Utterly and completely separated from anything that dishonors God. This is a chief character of God and is to be evident in His people.
- E. “to the LORD your God” – Notice that the purpose of holy living is primarily an act of worship. Holy living demonstrates a believer’s understanding that he is an ambassador of Christ in the world. Holy living begins in a repentant heart that is cleansed by Jesus, then is evident in behavior that represents Christ well.
- F. “chosen” – The heart of God choosing Israel to be His people is explained in Deuteronomy 7:7. Israel had no praiseworthy value or could offer nothing to God in order to earn His selection of them to be His people. The sole reason they were chosen to be the people of God out of all the other nations was that God sovereignly elected them on the basis of His love for them.
- G. Deuteronomy 7:1-5 (we will study this text October 31) includes God’s imperative that His people completely separate from sinful ways practiced by pagan cultures.

¹ From stewardship series by Dr. Dwayne Mercer; FBC Oviedo, Florida,.

Application

Ask: What outward appearances should Christians avoid today since we are God's chosen people? [Note that believers often ask, "Can you be a Christian and do this or that?" when making choices. That is not the best question to ask since we are not Christians by our works. A better question is, "Since I am a Christian, why would I do this or that?" Putting such a question in the context that all of our life belongs to Him and is to be used for His glory helps us in our pursuit of holy living.]

Ask: What makes us different from the rest of the world?

Ask: Why is it dangerous to work on outward behavior without first dealing with sin in the heart?

Lead your class to avoid simply changing outward behavior without first addressing the sinful condition of the heart. It is out of the heart that sin comes, so in order to honor God, we cannot merely modify our behavior to a set of rules; we must first confess our sinful condition. Also emphasize to your class that seeking holy living is only possible because the Holy Spirit lives in us. At the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit indwells us and enables us to be obedient to God out of clean heart.

Challenge your class to examine their hearts according to Deuteronomy 14:1-2. Lead them to consider whether or not they are practicing stewardship that is obvious to anyone that may see them. Verses 1-2 call believers to a stewardship of life. As believers we affirm that our lives are not our own, but we were bought with the price of the blood of Jesus Christ; therefore we practice life stewardship, which includes offering our lives to Him as holy by His grace.

II. Appetite Stewardship (vv. 3-21)

- A. The list of animals prohibited for human consumption is characterized by the single word "detestable," a term that suggests anything that is repulsive to and abhorred by God. In order to be wise stewards we must know what God has declared right and wrong. It is impossible to wisely utilize all God has entrusted to us without knowing His standard of good and bad. The details of what to eat and what not to eat demonstrate that stewardship of life includes the most basic actions of life including eating and drinking. We must consider every aspect of life when seeking to wisely utilize all God entrusts to us.
- B. The distinction of separation between clean and unclean animals is a reminder of Israel's separation from ungodly ways.
- C. *The distinction between "clean and unclean" sacrifices was known in the days of Noah (Gen 7:1-10) and therefore must have been told to our first parents when God taught them to worship. In the Jewish law, the words "clean" and "unclean" have nothing to do with the intrinsic nature or value of the creatures themselves. This was a designation given by the Lord for reasons not always explained. Some students believe that the Jews enjoyed better health because they avoided certain foods, but both Jesus and the apostles declared all foods clean (Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10:9-25; Rom 14:1-15:13), the so-called "healthful" foods as well as the "unhealthful." "Food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the better" (1 Cor 8:8, NKJV). Believers who think they are more spiritual than others because of what they eat or don't eat need to ponder Colossians 2:16-23.*

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- D. God called Israel to make a clear distinction between themselves and other cultures. He was not saying that certain animals in His creation were morally impure but rather was establishing evident distinctions between His people and all other pagan cultures. Pagan cultures ate and drank for their own pleasure, but God's people would eat and drink for the pleasure of God. The distinction in diet served as a demonstration that God's people submit to and honor Him in every aspect of life.
- E. In context, these animals were detestable because the Lord said so, and for that reason alone they were to be avoided. God, through the Law, taught Israel important lessons:
 - 1. They were to obey Him even if the commands did not seem logical or reasonable;
 - 2. They would fail to completely obey Him, thus would need a savior to deliver them from their sinful condition;
 - 3. They were to be meticulous in their stewardship of life down to the very food they ate.
- F. The list begins with ten animals that were acceptable for meat, all of which share in common the fact that they were split-hoofed.
- G. The standard by which to judge the quality of marine creatures was that they had to possess both fins and scales. This eliminated shellfish, eels, sharks, and the like. The creatures contained properties that can be harmful for human consumption, although that was not given as a reason for avoiding them. The reason for avoiding was to obey God's commands, thus honor Him even in the food they ate.
- H. The regulations concerning edible birds have in common that these birds for the most part were meat eaters.
- I. All insects were strictly forbidden.
- J. "Anything you find dead," could not be consumed because it would not have been slain according to God's prescribed ritual for Israel to follow.
- K. Boiling a young goat in its mother's milk was another cultic ritual that Israel was to abstain from in order to avoid the appearance of commonality with pagan cultures and pagan worship practices. Pagans carried out this practice as a fertility rite, believing that the act would mystically result in their producing more children. God required Israel to honor Him alone as the sole source of life.

Application

Since all foods are declared clean in the New Testament, what are some things that we are to avoid consuming today, and why would we avoid these things? Your class may enter a discussion at this point on the consumption of alcohol, greasy foods, tobacco products, etc. The following questions will help you guide your class in a biblical discussion on being wise stewards of our appetites. **Lead** your class to consider the following questions as they make decisions about wisely utilizing their appetite for certain foods and products for God's glory.²

I Corinthians 6:12-11:1; 13:1-13

- 1) Will this action be helpful to me? 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23
- 2) Will this action potentially enslave me? 1 Cor. 6:12

² These questions are provided by Dr. Daniel Akin. A complete transcript of his sermon on this subject can be accessed at <http://apps.sebts.edu/president/?p=857>

- 3) Will this action encourage my brother or sister in Christ? 1 Cor. 8:13; 10:24, 32
- 4) Will this action help or hinder my gospel witness? 1 Cor. 9:12, 19-23; 10:32-33
- 5) Is this action consistent with my new life in Christ? 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 19
- 6) Will this action violate my conscience? 1 Cor. 10:25-29
- 7) Will this action follow the pattern of the life of Jesus? 1 Cor. 11:1
- 8) Will this action show love to others? 1 Cor. 13:1-13
- 9) Will this action honor my body which belongs to God? 1 Cor. 6:19-20
- 10) Will this action glorify God? 1 Cor. 10:31

Note that just because something is “legal” does not necessarily mean that using or consuming it is wise stewardship.

III. Investment Stewardship (vv. 22-29)

- A. The long-standing precedent of the tithe being ten percent of a family’s annual produce is seen here again (Genesis 14:18-20; 28:22; Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-28).
- B. “tithe” – Remind your class of our definition: returning ten percent of my monetary increase to God, through my church, as an expression of worship (v. 22).
- C. “all the increase” – They were take the tithe from the gross of all they grew in the fields (v. 22). In a day when things were ordinarily bought and sold in kind, this would have taken the form of grain, wine, oil, livestock, and other commodities actually produced by the farmer.
- D. The “eating” before the Lord represented the meal that the children of Israel would eat as they made burnt offerings to God (v. 23).
- E. “make His name abide” – The sanctuary; the place where God chose to meet with His people (v. 23).
- F. “fear the LORD” -- The purpose of presenting the tithe was to instill in Israel the proper reverence for the Lord as the One to whom they were ultimately accountable and as the One who owns everything (v. 23).
- G. “journey too long” -- One problem with the offering of cattle and other such animals was the great distance that had to be travelled by some to get to the central sanctuary (v. 24).
- H. “exchange it for money” -- To solve this problem the law permitted the Israelite to sell this animal in his own region, then purchase the same kind of animal upon his arrival to the house of the Lord in order to offer the sacrifice to God (v. 25).
- I. “spend that money” -- They would use the money from the animal sold in order to purchase food for a thanksgiving feast with their family at the sanctuary as a celebration of all God had given. The tithe was used to honor the Lord as a meal of praise (v. 26). Some people may struggle with the idea that the Israelites ate the tithe that was offered to the Lord, but similar benefits occur today. When people tithe to the local church, they benefit in that they have a place to gather and worship God, chairs to sit in while studying the Word, sound systems so that the singing and preaching of the Word is clearly heard, etc. They offer their tithes to the Lord as an act of worship, and then those monies are used in part to assist them in their walk with Christ. The Israelites offered the ten percent to God as an act of worship, then

followed God's commands in purchasing a feast with that ten percent in order to eat to the glory of God.

- J. "not forsake the Levite" -- The Levites were the priests in the sanctuary, thus they had no property or secular occupation so they had to be sustained by God's people. As the Levite served the Lord, he could share in the tithe offered to the Lord by the people (v. 27).
- K. "third year" – Every three years they would not take the tithe to the sanctuary, but rather would set the tithe aside in their own barns, houses, or towns ("gates") in order to provide for the priests, Gentiles, orphans and widows. Generosity with their possessions was an act of worship to God. Generously providing for those that could not provide for themselves honored the Lord (vv. 28-29).
- L. "bless you" – This blessing was not intended to serve as a motivation for tithing. Rather, it was a reminder that disobedience to God would bring His punishment and that obedience would bring His favor on the work of their hands (29).

Application

Ask: How does tithing remind us of our accountability to God?

Ask: Why is tithing an act of worship?

Ask: Can someone tithe and still be disobedient to God? **Answer:** Yes, if they are tithing for selfish purposes, desire to be blessed or because they want others to know they give.

Lead those in your class that have not been tithing or have been tithing for a motive other than to worship God to recognize that it is sin. Therefore, the correction is not to start tithing, rather the correction is first to confess sin to God, ask for His cleansing of a heart that chose to keep the money or give money for self-serving purposes, and then demonstrate repentance by faithfully tithing as an act of worship before God.