LOVE LEADS TO CHANGED BEHAVIOR

Within the covenant structure of Deuteronomy, God first makes clear that salvation is from Him alone, by grace, not through right actions (chapters 1–4). As we fall in love with God, our response of gratitude changes our hearts (chapters 6–11) and ultimately leads us to greater obedience. In Deuteronomy 12–26, Moses describes a life in covenant with God, living out love for Him in every action. These chapters are loosely organized around the order of the Decalogue, with clusters of applications related to and in order of each of the Ten Words, which are universally applicable to all people for all time. I prefer to call these examples Application Laws rather than Civil Laws. Civil Law is not a very helpful category, because the Ten Words can be civil as well as universal. In addition, all of the normally so-called Civil Laws have universal principles that are still applicable to all people at all times, even if we no longer live in a theocracy.

Deuteronomy 14 is in the section on the third Word, relating to taking God’s name in vain. Again, this actually refers to “bearing God’s name,” which means to live so that people will look at us and see that we belong to God. And here is where it gets interesting, because all parts of our lives matter to God, not just the big things. Even what we eat matters to God and shows to the world who we follow (cf. Dan. 1). How we worship also matters to God, not just that we worship Him. Caring for the poor, as well as those who work for God, is a crucial part of living out God’s will. These are not done in order to be saved, but because we are saved!
Write out Deuteronomy 14:2–29 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Deuteronomy 14:2, 3, 21, 22. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
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Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

LIVING A HOLY LIFE

God calls us to be holy, because He is holy (Lev. 11:44, 45). This involves being set apart, living differently than the world around us. Yahweh is calling us to a higher standard, not to make us look foolish, but so that we can witness and care for those around us, so that our lives draw people to God through their healthiness and wholeness (Isa. 2:1–4). Holiness is manifested in practical things, not just inner character. The Ten Words are universal, describing God’s character and how we are to live it out. But the Israelites were not always clear what that would look like, so Moses gave them many examples in Deuteronomy 12–26. Some of the application laws are not directly relevant anymore, but the principles still apply. Others, however, are included in the universal law along with the Ten Words, because it is clear through the rest of the Bible that they apply to everyone else as well. Some of the dietary laws are part of this universal law, not the application laws, including not eating blood and not eating unclean animals.

The reasons that not eating unclean animals is part of the universal law include the following. God gives a distinction between clean and unclean animals from the very beginning (Gen. 6–9). In addition, when God gives the diet after the flood, He notes that only some of the animals may be eaten (in the Hebrew of Gen. 9:3). There is also no way to make unclean animals clean in the Torah (Lev. 11). Eating unclean meat is called an abomination, which is on par with the most heinous sins. In Leviticus, God also notes that one of the reasons He cast out the Canaanites was that they did not follow the food laws regarding unclean animals (Lev. 20:22–26). In addition, only clean animals are able to be sacrificed, but there are some clean animals that are not able to be sacrificed, which shows that the attribution is not a matter of ritual cleanliness.

Although it is important to see that diet is part of the universal law, the most powerful point to ponder from this passage is that God commands us to rejoice! Living a holy life is all about learning to fear the Lord, recognizing that He has blessed us, and then rejoicing in the gifts He has given. This change in our hearts leads us to overflow with good deeds toward those around us, including the most vulnerable and oppressed. As a result, tithing here is not so much about “giving back to God,” but rather rejoicing together with God and giving to help others, including those who are working for God and would not get paid otherwise. It is all about the attitude, and our hearts need changing to see it this way. The system of tithing in Deuteronomy 14 calls us to give much more than we would today, hinting at the need to see tithing as an outpouring of our heart’s gratitude, not a legalistic requirement for salvation.
NEW TESTAMENT AFFIRMATION

You might be thinking, but the New Testament does away with dietary laws! While it might seem so in a cursory glance, that is not actually the case. As far as eating blood is concerned, Genesis 9:4 is very clear that this is a universal law, applicable before Israel existed and as soon as God allowed meat eating. This is consistently recognized multiple times throughout the Old Testament, as well as in Acts 15 for what is still applicable to Gentiles. Acts 15 lists four prohibitions that were likely not clear to the Gentiles joining the church (no eating of blood, no eating of strangled things, no eating of food sacrificed to idols, no sexual immorality), whereas things like clean and unclean meats were already very clear to them, as we will see next.

In all the passages related to unclean meat in the New Testament, Paul and Jesus use the word common, not unclean. This indicates that they were addressing the concept of defilement by association, which arose after the exile when the Jews tried to avoid breaking the clean/unclean law (which they had broken before exile, and was one of the reasons they went into exile), by also not eating or touching anything that had touched something that was unclean. Jesus and Paul note that this defilement by association was not biblical, but that the clean/unclean distinction remained. You can see this clearly in the English in Acts 10:14 (Peter notes that he has not eaten anything “common” or “unclean”), and in the Greek in Romans 14:14 and Mark 7:17–23. In all these New Testament passages, God is referring to things called “common” (defilement by association) and pointing out that they should actually be acceptable, unlike what the Jews had added to the law. But the clean/unclean distinction is still valid.

As far as why certain animals are unclean and others are not, the Bible never gives us clarity. Many hypotheses have been put forward, but none of them fit all of the animals, although may be applicable for some. Perhaps this is similar to the Sabbath, in that God never gives a reason why He picked the seventh day, but He is calling us to be holy, and out of gratitude for His salvation, we delight in following His Word.

However, other laws in Deuteronomy 14 are not so clear as to what they mean, like the enigmatic reference to not boiling a kid in its mother’s milk. Out of this comes the Kashrut law regarding not eating meat and milk together (also referencing Exod. 23:19). While Kashrut could certainly be implied from this law, it seems likely that there was some additional situation that Moses is referring to, which has been lost today.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/deut08-4
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Leviticus 11:41–47  
Genesis 14:17–20  
Malachi 3:6–12  
Matthew 23:23  
Acts 15:19–31  
Leviticus 20:22–29  
Deuteronomy 12:1–7

What other verses come to mind in connection with Deuteronomy 14?
Many view Deuteronomy 14 as an example of the legalism in the Torah, but there is actually a much different picture of Jesus here. Yahweh is the one who blesses us! The blessing happens first, not after the tithe is given (vv. 22, 24). Tithing comes out of the joy in our hearts for God’s amazing grace to us. God chooses us, and we are His special treasure (v. 2). This is the basis for everything that follows. As we are God’s children, God wants the best for us, as well as for us to witness to everyone we meet about the God we serve.

Not only that, God desires us to rejoice with Him (v. 26)! As part of our time of rejoicing, we are to give to those less fortunate, including the Levites who minister before God in the temple (v. 27). Tithing is thus not about legalism but about rejoicing together with God as His children whom He has chosen.

In addition, part of rejoicing together with God involves eating together with Him. When the people were not willing to go up on the mountain to be with God, He called Moses and the elders to come up instead (Deut. 5:4; Exod. 24:9–11). Together, they ate and communed with God. This is what He longs to do with each of us! So, the dietary restrictions are for much more than health, since they also represent God’s desire to sup with us, and us with Him.

God also cares about animals, and the ideal diets throughout the Bible do not contain meat. While meat eating is not prohibited, God calls us to strive for the ideal of a whole-foods, plant-based diet, as in Eden and as will be in heaven. Animals will also return to their Edenic ideal in heaven (Isa. 11, 65). However, because of sin, meat-eating is allowed, but it is restricted to still value the life of the animal. Blood and fat are always forbidden, as are unclean animals. This makes clear that God is trying to point us away from meat as something that tastes good, and toward using meat only as necessary for nutritional purposes.

Diet matters in our relationship with God, and He blesses us when we choose to follow His instructions for health. Daniel experienced this firsthand, by eating whole plant foods (Dan. 1), and many scientific studies today are corroborating what Yahweh told us from the beginning. God cares about our health and animals, as well as desiring to make us as pure as possible in fellowship with Him.
FLESH AS FOOD

“The diet appointed man in the beginning did not include animal food. Not till after the Flood, when every green thing on the earth had been destroyed, did man receive permission to eat flesh.

“In choosing man’s food in Eden, the Lord showed what was the best diet; in the choice made for Israel He taught the same lesson. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt and undertook their training, that they might be a people for His own possession. Through them He desired to bless and teach the world. He provided them with the food best adapted for this purpose, not flesh, but manna, ‘the bread of heaven.’ It was only because of their discontent and their murmuring for the fleshpots of Egypt that animal food was granted them, and this only for a short time. Its use brought disease and death to thousands. Yet the restriction to a nonflesh diet was never heartily accepted. It continued to be the cause of discontent and murmuring, open or secret, and it was not made permanent.

“Upon their settlement in Canaan, the Israelites were permitted the use of animal food, but under careful restrictions which tended to lessen the evil results. The use of swine’s flesh was prohibited, as also of other animals and of birds and fish whose flesh was pronounced unclean. Of the meats permitted, the eating of the fat and the blood was strictly forbidden.

“Only such animals could be used for food as were in good condition. No creature that was torn, that had died of itself, or from which the blood had not been carefully drained, could be used as food.

“By departing from the plan divinely appointed for their diet, the Israelites suffered great loss. They desired a flesh diet, and they reaped its results. They did not reach God’s ideal of character or fulfill His purpose. The Lord ‘gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.’ Psalm 106:15. They valued the earthly above the spiritual, and the sacred pre-eminence which was His purpose for them they did not attain.” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 311, 312.)

A Revival in Health Reform

“When men and women are truly converted, they will conscientiously regard the laws of life that God has established in their being, thus seeking to avoid physical, mental, and moral feebleness. Obedience to these laws must be made a matter of personal duty. We ourselves must suffer the ills of violated law. We must answer to God for our habits and practices. Therefore the question for us is not, ‘What will the world say?’ but, ‘How shall I, claiming to be a Christian, treat the habitation God has given me? Shall I work for my highest temporal and spiritual good by keeping my body as a temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, or shall I sacrifice myself to the world’s ideas and practices?’” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), 369, 370.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What difference does it make to truly understand the foundation of salvation by faith/grace in Deuteronomy as you think about these passages?

How can you eat better so as to inspire others to health and heaven?

How should God’s care for animals impact my heart and my diet?

How can I live out these principles of diet in Scripture without becoming legalistic?

How else can holiness be manifested in the practical areas of life?

In what ways does tithing remind me of where all my money comes from?

How can I use my resources to bless those who are less fortunate?