

Deuteronomy 14:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.

Analysis

Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. Israel's identity as children of the LORD establishes the foundation for distinctive holiness. Covenant relationship demands covenant behavior - God's children must reflect their Father's character.

The prohibitions against cutting flesh and shaving in mourning practices distinguished Israel from pagan neighbors who engaged in these rituals. Canaanite and other ancient Near Eastern peoples mutilated their bodies as expressions of grief or attempts to appease death deities.

God forbids these practices not arbitrarily but because they contradict Israel's identity. Children of the living God need not engage in extreme mourning rituals that suggest hopelessness or fear of death. Their confidence rests in God's sovereignty over life and death.

Reformed theology sees here the principle that gospel identity shapes gospel behavior. What we are determines how we act. Because believers are children of God through adoption in Christ, we conduct ourselves in ways that reflect our Father's character.

Historical Context

Pagan mourning practices in the ancient Near East included ritual self-laceration, shaving the head or beard, and other physical expressions of grief. These often connected to ancestor worship or attempts to appease death deities.

God's prohibition set Israel apart visually and culturally from surrounding nations, marking them as a people who worshiped the living God rather than fearing death and the dead.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does identity as children of God shape proper behavior and worship?
2. Why did God forbid mourning practices that were culturally common among Israel's neighbors?
3. What does this prohibition teach about the relationship between gospel identity and ethics?
4. How should Christian confidence in resurrection affect our mourning practices?
5. What pagan practices do believers today need to reject based on their identity in Christ?

Interlinear Text

תַּתְגַּדְּ דְּ וְ	לֹא	אֱלֹהִיכְ מְ	לִיהְיוּ הַ	אַתְּ מְ	בָּנְ יִםְ	Ye are the children	H1121	H859	H3068	H430	H3808	ye shall not cut	H1413	
לֹא	תַּשְׁוִיכְ יְמֹ	תַּשְׁוִיכְ הַ	קָרְבָּן	בְּ	יְ	עִינְיכְ מְ	לְמַתְּ	H3808	H7760	H7144	H996	between your eyes	for the dead	H4191

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 21:5 (Parallel theme): They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Jeremiah 41:5 (References Lord): That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD.

Jeremiah 16:6 (Parallel theme): Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them:

Romans 9:8 (References God): That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

Galatians 3:26 (References God): For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Romans 9:26 (References God): And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Hebrews 2:10 (Parallel theme): For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Romans 8:16 (References God): The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

John 1:12 (References God): But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Hosea 1:10 (References God): Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

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