**Obedience Commanded**

I am saddened to report the demise of Yoder’s Dutch Kitchen in Abbeville, another victim of Covid. Michele and I ate there on numerous occasions when we were travelling through on the way to the Upstate. It was a restaurant specializing in food prepared in the tradition of the Pennsylvania Amish community. It was described as a smorgasbord which is similar to a buffet but with the staff preparing your plate, much like the S&S Cafeteria in Augusta (the one in North Augusta closed years ago). Unlike the school cafeteria at Riverside Elementary where I went to grade school, Yoder’s allowed you to choose what meats and vegetables you wanted. The term cafeteria style has crept into the vernacular to describe a variety of products that are packaged with numerous options, allowing you to customize what you purchase. Most health insurance plans are sold as cafeteria plans. In our study of Deuteronomy chapter 4, Moses warned the Israelites that God’s law is not a cafeteria plan which allowed them to pick and choose the laws they would observe.

The chapter begins with Moses telling the people to hear the decrees and laws he was about to teach them. As we discussed 2 weeks ago, Deuteronomy is a series of sermons preached by Moses to the Israelites. He told them to follow the laws so that they would live to take possession of Canaan. He told them not to add or subtract from what God had ordained (see also Rev. 22:18-19). He began by reminding them of what had recently happened at Baal Peor where they had joined with Moabite women in idol worship, noting that those who held fast to the Lord were still alive (see Numbers chapter 25). Moses told them he was teaching the decrees and laws as God had commanded, indicating that what he taught came directly from God rather than something he made up himself. He told them that if they observed God’s laws, they could be an example to other nations, showing that God was near to them. He went on to tell them not to forget the laws or let them slip from their hearts and told them to teach their children and grandchildren. He reminded them of the day at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) when God gave them the Ten Commandments. While some had not yet been born at that time, there were some who were old enough to remember the sound of God’s voice and how the mountain blazed with fire.

Moses then devoted much time to warn against idol worship which would prove to become a snare entrapping the Israelites. Note that animals on the ground, birds in the air and the sun, moon and stars had the potential to become objects of worship in place of God. These were all things that were visible while God remained hidden from their view so Moses reminded them that it was God who had brought them out of the bondage of Egypt. Moses acknowledged that he would not cross the Jordan but they would and that they were to remember the covenant they had made with God. Moses then prophesied about the future generations which would succumb to idol worship and be banished from Canaan but that God would allow a repentant remnant to return. Moses then challenged the people asking if any other nation had previously heard God speak or had seen the miracles that He had performed. He told them that God had done those things so that they would know that he was the only true God and therefore they were to keep His commands so they would enjoy long life in the land He was giving them. Moses then established 3 cities east of the Jordan River as cities as refuge in accordance with God’s instruction. The chapter closes with a preface of the law that Moses was about to lay before the people.

The warning Moses gave about adding or subtracting from God’s law was prophetic as the Israelites would be guilty of both. Jesus railed against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees who were strict in observing some laws while ignoring others (see the 7 woes of Matt. Chapter 23). They were especially diligent in the enforcement of laws on the people. We need to be careful today not to view the Bible as a cafeteria where we can choose what we want to follow and reject those commands which are not convenient. You may have recently read that the Supreme Court upheld a baker’s right to refuse to sell a wedding cake to a same sex couple. I saw a comment posted wondering if the baker had the same objection to preparing a wedding cake for someone who was getting married after a divorce (see Mal. 2:16 and Matt. 19:8). I am not suggesting a moral equivalence of divorce and same sex marriage (see 1st Cor. 7:15), yet the concept of questioning outrage on one issue and silence on another should be food for thought. If we either add or subtract from God’s law, we are in effect saying that His law is insufficient and that it needs a human touch to improve it. Just as the Israelites had an opportunity to be witnesses to other nations, we can choose hypocrisy or consistency to guide our witness today.