

# Deuteronomy 28

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if we read the whole chapter tonight, you'd have found quite quickly that the first 14 verses that we're read to us were all blessings.! The next 54 verses are all threatened curses. I wonder how that makes you feel. I wonder how you would feel if we'd actually read it all out.

Now, we have a neighbour a couple of doors down who we're reading the Bible with, or trying to read the Bible with, every couple of weeks. A few weeks ago, she said to me, Stuart, God is so demanding, isn't he? And I think if she'd read this chapter, she would feel she had evidence to back her claim there.

I have other good-believing friends who say, well, we don't need to worry about Deuteronomy chapter 28. After all, we know Jesus has taken our curse. This is the old covenant. We have the new covenant. We don't need to worry about this.

I want to say that is not quite true. That is real simplistic. We need Deuteronomy chapter 28. Because in it, we hear and see God's love.

We see it in three ways. We see it in God's desire to bless his undeserving people. We see it secondly in God's desire to discipline his wayward people when necessary.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] And thirdly, we see it finally, and perhaps unexpectedly, in the fact that God will punish rebellious people. There are three ways we see God's love. His desire to bless his undeserving people.

His desire to discipline his wayward people. And ultimately, his purpose to destroy faithless people. Those who break his covenant. Let's look at those in turn as quickly as we can.

So first of all, we see a desire to bless his undeserving people. As we see who he's talking to here. So this section actually ends in chapter 29, verse 1. And there, Moses sums up by saying, the recorder right sums it up, these are the words of the covenant.

The Lord God commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab. Besides the covenant that he made with him at Horeb. So who is Moses speaking to? Who is the Lord speaking to?

He's speaking to the covenant people. He's speaking to the people he had rescued from Egypt. He's speaking to the people he had pledged to take him to the promised land. And they are undeserving people.

[ 2 : 1 5 ] Just like you and me. And as they stood there, looking across to the promised land, what were the temptations that faced them? Well, through the book of Deuteronomy, we've seen the two big temptations that Moses comes back to time and time again.

Complacency and conformity. Complacency in the sense of taking God's grace for granted. Enjoying the gifts and forgetting the given. And conformity in the sense of conforming to the practices and the attitudes and beliefs of the people of Canaan, the people we were supposed to dispossess.

And actually, one of the big temptations for us tonight is God's covenant people. Is it not complacency and conformity? Complacency. We've trusted in Jesus.

Complacency. We're part of a Presbyterian church. We've got a great history. We've got a great doctrine. We've got everything we need. We can be complacent, can't we?

And of course, conformity, well, it's right in our faces, isn't it? The pressures conforms to the world around us. The desires conform to be relevant. Oh, people don't believe in this old strict morality anymore.

[ 3 : 2 8 ] We need to compromise, to be relevant, to be able to get alongside them. So don't we stand in the same place as these people Moses was speaking to? And so it's important we see what the Lord longs to bless his undeserving people.

You see that if you get a look at verse 1. If you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all the commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth, and these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you.

See, the Lord wants to bless his people. He wants to fill his people with good things. If we read through the chapter in more detail, we'd see some of the things he wants to fill us with. And they're all the things that every human being wants in the bottom of their hearts.

Everyone wants some kind of status, some sense of belonging. And that's what the Lord promises there. He'll set you above the nations of the earth. Moreover, he promises fruitfulness in all your work.

Verse 4. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground, the fruit of your cattle, and the increase of your herds, and the young of your flock. And see, that's an absolute contrast to the curse of Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

[ 4 : 40 ] What did he curse? He said the woman would have problems in the pain of childbearing, and the man would suffer in the toil of his hands. Yet God's ultimate purpose is not curse, but blessing.

Meaning there's no first hand. The pain of childlessness, or the pain of a child dying in childbirth, or stillbirth, or miscarriage. Yet that is not God's ultimate will.

He wants to bless his people with fruitfulness. With fruitfulness in work and in the ground as well. And also security. Look at verse 7. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you.

And shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. Fruitfulness, security, significance. All these things that every human being wants. That is what God wants in his love for his undeserving people.

And of course those things only reach final fulfillment in the new creation. When there is nothing accursed. When God's people will serve him and see him face to face. And will be secure forever.

[ 5 : 44 ] But that is that ultimately what God wants for his covenant people. His undeserving people. But why does God want to bless Israel in this way?

Is this just favoritism? Well no, of course not. God's promises to Israel, God's purposes for Israel, were ultimately not for them alone, but for the whole world. You get a snapshot of that if you look down to verse 9 for a moment.

The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, set apart for himself as he's sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you.

See there we see a snapshot of God's missionary purpose for his people. He wants to bless his covenant people for the sake of the earth. You see for the peoples around to see that Israel are called by the name of the Lord, really meant three things.

First, they'd see that Israel belonged to the living God. His power and presence would be obviously with them. Secondly, the nations would see something of the Lord's character, as his people lived out their lives in covenant faithfulness.

[ 7 : 00 ] And seeing the Lord's character, they would fear as him. Not because of Israel's own strength, but because of the Lord's supernatural power evidently with them. And then thirdly, seeing his power and his presence, some would be attracted to come and worship the living God.

And we see that reflected in the pages of the New Testament. We don't have time to go there now. We've looked at Acts chapter 5. As Ananias and Sapphira, who's seeking to lie to God, were then faced as judgment and knocked down dead.

The peoples feared, Luke tells us, to join in with the disciples. And yet, a multitude were added to their number. Why? Because they were God's people, being faithful to God's covenant.

And God's power and presence was evident with them. And the peoples feared that that caused them to come and worship the living God as well. So here we are, as we get to Deuteronomy 28.

The Lord is laying his choice before his people. He's showing them what he longs for, what he wants to give his undeserving people. And yet he's holding out to them this choice. Are you going to love me?

[ 8 : 10 ] Are you going to keep trusting me? Or would you forsake me through complacency and compromise? You see that choice very clearly. If you look down at verse 20.

Well, back in verse 15, he says, If you will not obey the voice of the Lord, well be careful. What will happen? Verse 20, The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and frustration in all you undertake to do until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of your evil deeds.

Why? Because you have forsaken me. That's the ultimate choice he's putting before them. Will you love me and trust me?

Or will you forsake me through complacency and compromise? Now, some of us may have concern at this point. Especially if you remember what it says in verse 1.

I've heard all through this section. If you do what I obey, what I say, if you obey what I command, then I will bless you. Now, is this works, righteousness? Is this you have to earn God's blessing?

[ 9 : 14 ] Is this what this passage is teaching? Well, no. No. Let me try and illustrate it like this. The Rugby World Cup starts soon.

I googled the other day to find out, and tickets for the World Cup final at Twickenham, which I could walk to from my house quite easily, cost, at the moment, anywhere between £1,000 and £10,000, depending on how good you want your tickets to be.

Now, I am never in a million years going to earn £10,000 to buy a ticket to get to the Rugby World Cup final. However, imagine for a moment that some rich, wealthy benefactor has said to me, or to you, look, I've got a couple of tickets to the Rugby World Cup final.

Would you like to go? I would say, yes! Now, what would I have to do in that scenario to get to the Rugby World Cup final and enjoy the blessing of being there?

Well, I'd have to believe the promise, wouldn't I? I'd have to believe that the ticket my friend was offering me, my imaginary friend, I hesitate to have it, was actually real. The second thing I'd have to do is then take that ticket and go to Twickenham on the 31st of October, present that ticket, and get it to the ground.

[ 10 : 24 ] If I didn't have my ticket with me, if I was turned up, so all my friends said I could come, would I get in? Of course not. Now, does that ticket, does having that ticket, does that earn me a place?

No. I'd have done nothing for that ticket, I'd just believe the promise. It would not earn me a place in Twickenham Stadium for the final, but it would be necessary to be there.

It would be necessary for me to have the ticket in order to enjoy the blessing of being the final. And so it is with obedience, with Israel's obedience.

It didn't earn the right to God's blessing. They already were blessed as God's people, they already had that privilege. But it was what was necessary for them to enjoy the blessing.

Just as possessing the ticket which I hadn't earned would be necessary for me to enjoy the blessing of the Rugby World Cup final. Scotland won't be there, so it won't be disastrous in the Washington Blues.

[ 11 : 28 ] What we see here is that God wants to bless his undeserving people. And they inherit that blessing through faith. By believing the promise, that faith being lived out in their lives.

And that's the same for us, isn't it? All the blessings of the new covenant that are ours in Christ are enjoyed. They're not earned, but they're enjoyed as we trust in him.

So that's the first way we see God's love in this chapter. We see it in his undeserving, his longing to bless his undeserving people. But secondly, we see his love in the way he will discipline his wayward people.

So all these curses from verse 15 onwards, primarily they're about bringing his people back to himself. These are the kind of curses the prophets are speaking about as they come to present God's claim for his covenant people.

As we looked at Joel the other week, as Paul was preaching through Joel, he saw the locusts. They're mentioned here in Deuteronomy chapter 28. If you look through the small print, you'll find them. Where God's people turned aside from him, he would send these curses upon them.

[ 12 : 33 ] In order, primarily, to turn them back. Let's look at a couple of test cases here. Remember the great temptations? There's a temptation to conformity to the world around us, the patterns of the nations around them.

And those nations, primarily, their religions were fertility religions. They'd worship Baal, in the hope that Baal would send rain on the land and make it fertile and fruitful.

So they'd get wealthy. Well, look at verse 22 for a minute. See one of the curses that the Lord promises. The Lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat

and with drought and with blight and with mildew.

They shall pursue you until you perish. And the heavens over your head shall be bronze and the earth under you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

In other words, if you go looking to Baal to make your land fruitful, there will be no rain. Think of Elijah praying there'll be no rain for three years and there was no rain. Why? Because he was praying the covenant promises of God.

[ 13 : 43 ] That God would discipline his people to turn them back. This is God's love, showing his desire to discipline his people to turn them back. And it's true for us now as well, isn't it?

Where do we pursue fruitfulness? As even as a church. So many churches think fruitfulness will come from pragmatism, from playing the right music, from having the right programs, from having the right singers up front.

That adores a crowd. Yet that is not the way fruitfulness comes, is it? Fruitfulness comes from trusting the living God and keeping his word.

There's also temptation individually, isn't there? To conform to the moral relativism of the world. So that we feel like we're in touch. That, yes, we should say gay marriage is a good thing.

Because it's loving, isn't it? It will help us build relationships if we say that. And yet, no. That is falling into the patterns of following the idols of this world.

[ 14 : 46 ] What about materialism? The hope that actually finances, having enough money, will bring salvation, will make life better for everyone. There's a very interesting series of articles published in The Guardian back in 2008, when the financial crash first hit.

The overall title was, Our Gods Have Failed Us. Because every false god will, lasting security, lasting peace, lasting joy, is not found in anything other than the living God coming to him.

Every false god will fail. And so the Lord is disciplining his people. That's what these curses are about. Well, if conformity was one problem, the other problem, of course, was complacency.

We'll look down to verse 47. Some of these curses are directed at their complacency. Look at verse 47. Over the page. Do you hear the warning there?

You could have served the Lord and given you so much, but you're so complacent about the abundance of things that I'll take them away. And in hunger and thirst you'll serve your enemies.

[ 16 : 06 ] The wealth could make them complacent. Trusting in their own strength and human schemes could make them and us complacent. Look at verse 52. The Lord says, talking about Israel's enemies, they shall besiege you in your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout all your land.

Do you hear the warning? Trust in your own schemes. Trust in your own plans. They will fail. I will bring them down.

See, we can be complacent when we think about the history of our church as a denomination. We can be complacent personally in our own lives.

We think, oh, look how I served the Lord in the past. Look how the Lord has used me in the past.

We can be complacent with our theology, can't we?

We have all the right doctrines. We have it all in our head. Yet for our hearts to be unchanged, and us actually cling to our systems as good as they are, and not to the Lord who has brought us and loved us.

[ 17 : 18 ] See, the Lord will send his discipline on us if necessary, to break us out of our complacency and our conformity. But ultimately, that discipline, if we will not respond, if our hearts, like Israel, are hard, will result in judgment.

Now, it's the third way in this chapter we see God's incredible love. Yes, he wants to bless his undeserving people. Yes, he will discipline his way of people.

But ultimately, he will destroy the faithless people, the covenant breakers. That's what we see there. Look at verse 58, for example.

And this really is the key verse I think in the passage. If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God, then the Lord your God, the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sickness grievous and lasting.

See, Israel, as God's holy nation, as those rescued by the living God, as those who have experienced his grace so incredibly, should have feared the Lord God.

[ 18 : 38 ] They should have recognized his glorious and awesome name. Now of course, every human being who has ever lived as made in God's image should fear the name of the Lord God Almighty, should worship him and love him and bow before him, for he is worthy of all praise.

Yet God's covenant people, those who have experienced so much, Israel of the Old Testament, those who have baptized into the church in the New Testament, shouldn't we truly fear his name and honor him?

The refusal to bow down and worship will lead to destruction. Look on to verse 63 for a second. As the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you and you will be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

And of course, that happened. 722 BC, the Assyrians came in and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. 586, the Babylonians came in and the Lord destroyed Judah.

Even the temple was destroyed as well. Why? Because as a nation, Israel had broken the covenant. They had, in the words of verse 20, forsaken the Lord.

[ 20 : 00 ] The marriage was over, as it were. So they got what they deserved. They become utterly complacent. God promised us this land, but we stay here forever.

They become utterly conformed. Read through Jeremiah and read how they were worshipping the starry host amongst other things. Falling into the patterns of the world around them. They proved that their hearts were still hard despite God's grace system.

They proved that they were not regenerate. They had not been changed as a nation, although individuals had. And so God must judge them. We need to understand this connection between God's love and God's judgment because it's vital.

See, God's judgment, his wrath, it's not just something that flares up in a moment. Not like me getting angry when I'm being in love and he curls me up on my bike. Sorry, John, I don't want to hear it before you.

That's not for sure. He's always been very good driving around me, I have to say. My apologies to any other BMW drivers in the room. But God's anger is not like that.

[ 21 : 04 ] It is his settled, controlled, personal hostility towards everything that destroys what he loves. God's wrath is his settled, controlled, personal hostility to all that destroys what he loves.

He loves his people, he loves his world, he loves, of course, most of all his own glory, as we saw back in verse 58. Because the whole world unravels, where God is not acknowledged as glorious and beautiful.

See, the Lord wasn't demanding perfection from his people, he was demanding faithfulness. They'd be faithful to the covenant, there were plenty of sacrifices, they could deal with their sins, but they rejected God's love, they therefore opposed God's good purposes, therefore they made themselves God's enemies.

Now at this point you might be thinking, well hang on, hasn't Jesus taken our curse? Doesn't Paul say that? Well Paul does say that, Galatians 3, 13. He writes to the Galatians, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

As it is written, cursed is anyone, everyone is hanged on a tree. So yes, in a sense, Christ has taken the curse. But does that mean we can just ignore these verses in Deuteronomy?

[ 22 : 21 ] Well, yes and no. Yes, Christ, the Son of God, the eternal, excuse me, the eternal Son of God as Paul said in his prayer, in great condescension came into the world, took on human flesh for us, became obedient even to death on a cross, taking our sin upon himself.

Yes, he did bear the curse for his people on the cross so that all who trust in him can receive a blessing. But no, that does not mean we can ignore these verses in Deuteronomy because the same dynamic is still at work.

We either embrace God's covenant promises by faith and that he's seen in our lives as God changes our hearts by his grace in the new covenant. Or we just go through life as part of his covenant people but never actually embracing the reality of those promises that were held out to us never actually trusting truly in Christ.

And remember for all those Old Testament believers they were saved the same way as us. All those sheep and goats that the Old Testament believers took to the tabernacle and then to the temple yes, their sins were forgiven but not because of the goats and the cows but because all those sacrifices pointed forward ultimately to the one true sacrifice to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So yes, Jesus took their curse as well the individuals who believed in him. But for you and I we can't just ignore this chapter. We have to look at our own hearts.

[ 23 : 55 ] Am I truly trusting? Is Jesus really my saviour and my king? Is he at work in my heart transforming my life so that he's seen in my actions?

Yes. So our faith in Christ will be evident in our lives. To go back to that illustration of the rugby match again faith in the promise of the ticket is shown in the action of going to Twickenham Stadium and presenting it to Gideon.

So how can we be sure we're safe? Well let me use this illustration I'm trying to do it quite quickly. One I'm sure you've heard before. From the prairies of North America after a long hot summer prairie fires can easily start up or dry grass with the sun beating down.

And as the winds blow those fires can move quite quickly across the plains. But the naked American Indians hundreds of years ago worked out how to cope with this. How do you cope with a fire they blow quickly towards you?

Light another fire. Burn the ground. When you stand on the scorched earth you are safe because there is no fuel left for that fire to devour. So standing in the scorched earth is a safe place to stand.

[ 25 : 05 ] So they saw the flames coming how could they make them safe? look where you're standing. The winds of God's love will blow the flames of his wrath across this earth.

How can we know we're safe on that day? Answer we need to stand in the place which has already been burned. We need to stand within the Lord Jesus Christ the one who has borne God's wrath against sin.

every sin will be paid for. It will either have been paid for at Calvary by the eternal Son of God who was cursed from us or we will take it ourselves.

We need to look where we're standing. Are we standing within Christ? Or are we standing on something else? Are we being complacent? Are we conformed to the world?

Or are we trusting truly in Christ Jesus? Now I guess in this room there are three types of people.

For some of you group one this is a really hard message because you have dear baptized children who you've brought to be part of God's covenant people and at the moment they are running away.

[ 26 : 22 ] I cannot imagine how painful that is and I know you must feel awful what I want to say to you as we look at these scriptures is remember God's grace his great patience and his gracious promises.

Remember his patience. It was about 700 years from when Moses spoke these words to when the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed to when the final curse fell on them.

The Lord is patient. Your dear children may be running away now. But in the Lord's timescale keep praying.

He is patient. He is more patient than we are. And remember his great promises. He longs to bless his undeserving people. And thirdly let me also say another professor of mine is not Dr.

Douglas who is with us tonight but another professor used to tell the story of a lady who had come to faith relatively late in life. Her father had been a minister. Many of her siblings had believed.

[ 27 : 30 ] And yet she herself had rejected the faith until after her father had died. He never got to see her coming back to the Lord. I guess you may well know now.

Certainly that day the Lord Jesus comes back and we're with him in the new creation. There will be a great happy reunion in that family. Even if your children do not come back in your lifetime. That doesn't mean that the grace of the Lord has failed.

Pray on. A second group of people are those who perhaps are here and have never trusted in Christ for yourself. You may be around church a lot. You may know the answers to all the questions.

You may know the Bible well. And yet you could be like the ancient Israelites, going through the motions and never trusting the promises. Maybe you're being complacent.

Maybe you're being conformed to the world. What this passage says to you tonight is seek shelter in the one place you can find it. Don't think that you're actually a nice person that's good enough.

[ 28 : 34 ] Paul says immediately before the verses in Galatians that I just quoted, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, curse thee everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law and do them.

None of us, none of us can impress God or earn his love without behaviour. Please do not be complacent. Please do not sit on the fence.

Come to the Lord Jesus who has borne the curse you deserve that you might have the blessing that he can pour out. There's a third group of people there tonight as well as those whose children have turned away as well as those who perhaps are part of the community of God's people were never truly embraced did.

Those of us who do know Jesus as Lord, who do love him, who do trust him, what does this say to us? It says keep on, keep on revering the glorious name of the Lord who has brought us.

Watch out for complacency, watch out for conformity. Look at what the Lord is doing in your life, in our lives. See how he is disciplining us as a father who loves us.

[ 29 : 47 ] We respond in faith that goes back to the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus himself speaking to his disciples said this, I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.

The branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. We need to make sure we're standing on the ground that has already been burned, don't we? We need to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and his words.

And by grace we are saved and inherit all the good that our gracious Lord wants to give his undeserving people. Is he demanding? No.

God's blood is amazing. He wants to bless, therefore he will discipline, but ultimately he will destroy the covenant breakers. Let's come to him undeserving as we are and abide in Jesus.

[ 30 : 48 ] Let's pray.