

# Deuteronomy 29 & 30

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Date: 02 August 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're living in a consumer culture, we're always faced with choices, aren't we? Remember having spent a year in Kenya when I moved back here 20 years ago,! Going to the supermarket for the first time to be overwhelmed by the number of ice creams or types of meat or anything else that I could choose to have.

We're faced with choices every day, aren't we? Cappuccino or latte? Bran flakes or corn flakes? Or whatever it is. It's supporting Fulham or supporting Brentford or just ignoring football altogether. And most of these choices don't make any difference. And I guess if we ask most of our neighbours about the choice to believe in God or not, or the choice to go to church or not, they would say, well, that's up to you.

It's a lifestyle choice. Just like choosing your hobby. Some people are into sport, some people are into films, some people are into religion. It's up to you. None of these choices are that important.

And yet as Moses presents the choice to God's people, he is telling the Israelites, this is important.

[ 1 : 08 ] It is serious and it is urgent. Just look at the end of the choice he presents in these two chapters. Look at the end of chapter 30, verse 19. He's offering the choice between life and death.

I call heaven and earth the witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life that you may live.

So at this point we've reached the conclusion of Moses' great sermon. Essentially, for the last 28 chapters, he's been preaching God's word to God's people.

They've come out of Egypt. They've been in the desert for 40 years through their own unbelief. Now they're standing on the plains of Moab, looking over to the promised land that God had promised them. And Moses is urging them, imploring them, to choose life.

The seriousness is there, isn't it? It's a choice between life or death. And the urgency is there.

Today, he says. In fact, that word today features nine times in these two chapters.

[ 2 : 15 ] It's an urgent choice. It's not one we can put off. It's a choice that faces us too. Choosing Jesus Christ, choosing to embrace Christianity, is not a lifestyle choice.

It's not a hobby. It is everything. It is serious and it is important. It is urgent. And we're going to see that as we follow through Moses' speech.

He's already got four main points to make here. As he talks about, his overall message is that because the God of the Bible, because the triune God offers real life to his people, his people must be loyal to him in every area of life.

Now, as we look through how Moses presents this choice, we'll see he shows us his offer of life, he shows us four things about his offer of life. It is real, not made up.

It is a privilege, not a burden. It is a gracious gift, not something that is earned. And it is all or nothing.

[ 3 : 18 ] It is real, it's a privilege, it's gracious, and it's all or nothing. So we start with, back at the start of chapter 29, Moses is emphasizing the reality. It is a real offer.

He reviews some of Israel's history with them. So look, for example, at verse 2. Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, You have seen all the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and all his servants in all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders.

Do you hear the emphasis there? It's on what you have seen. It's on the reality of their own experience. Now, in fact, the people Moses was speaking to who hadn't been born at the point that God rescued them from Egypt, rescued their fathers from Egypt.

So their eyes hadn't literally seen, but their fathers had. They had heard the witness. They knew the reality of the Lord's acts for his people. Now in verses 2 and 3, he's talking about the reality of the

acts of God and rescuing the exodus from Egypt.

And in verses 5 and 6, he talks about the historical reality of the Lord's provision in the wilderness. Then in verses 7 and 8, he reminds them of the historical reality that they had seen, of the Lord giving them victory over the Amorite kings, over Og and Sihon.

[ 4 : 44 ] So the emphasis is on the reality of this offer. It's not make-believe. It is based on God's acts in history. And so it is for us, as Christians, who live the way through in the story.

Our faith is based on the reality of God's acts in human history, supremely through the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was talking to a neighbour of mine a week or so ago. And he said, well, how would you explain to anyone why you believe this stuff? And so I said, because it's real. Because it's true. Because Jesus has risen from the dead.

And of course he looked at me like I was an idiot. Although I was interested to discover after that conversation that 10 years ago, 2005, Newsweek magazine, Easter 2005, their front page story was about the resurrection.

They had an article entitled From Jesus to Christ. In which Newsweek magazine argued that the most plausible explanation for the birth of Christianity was that Jesus of Nazareth was physically risen from the dead.

[ 5 : 51 ] Now it amazed me that a major American journal should put that on their front page. But actually it's a logical conclusion. Because what we believe is not make-believe.

It's not made up. It is real. It's based on the historical acts of God. So why is it that when Newsweek magazine can have that as a front page story, why is it more people don't believe?

Well the answer is in verse 4 of chapter 29. Moses says, you've seen all this stuff, you know what God has done, and yet, verse 4, to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or hear.

See, people can have all the evidence they like. They will not cause them to believe. What we need is God to open our blind eyes and to grant our hard hearts faith in his promises.

Otherwise, people would assume that the choice to believe in Christianity is just like the choice to believe in healing crystals or the choice to believe the world is flat. It's all equally pointless. But it's not.

[ 7 : 01 ] It is real. Real acts in history involve real decisions. So first of all, the offer of life is real. And secondly, Moses wants us to see it is a privilege and not a burden.

Look on to chapter 29, verse 10. You see, he's standing there to form Moses. He's calling all the people there in chapter 29, verse 10. You're standing here today, all of you, before the Lord, your God.

The heads of your tribes, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, the sojourner who's in your camp, to the one who chops the wood, to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord your God, which the Lord your God is making with you today.

See, it's a privilege. They're gathered there so the Lord can establish them as his people. But he can keep the promise he made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

It's a privilege to belong to a living God. You see, it's his initiative. It's not like Moses and the Israelites voted for this to happen. Rather, God is making it.

[ 8 : 10 ] He has brought them out of Egypt. He is taking the initiative. It's a privilege to belong to him. Do you see how inclusive it is? It's not just for the good people. It's not just for the grown-ups.

It's not just for the native Israelites. It's for all the people who are there. It is inclusive. The young and old. That's why in this church we baptize children.

Because all who are, it's not just the believer, those who already believe who are part of God's covenant people. The privilege of these promises in the New Testament and the Old is held out to the little ones as well.

Those who are part of God's covenant people. Those who have the privilege of having these promises held out to them. So it's inclusive. Relation privilege. It's also an enduring privilege. Do you see in verse 14? It is not with you alone that I'm making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God and with whoever is not here with us today.

[ 9 : 14 ] In other words, for the future generations to come. For those who have not yet been born. And as those people standing there and for the children of those people have the privilege of being

part of God's covenant of grace.

So we today later on in the story are following on from our fathers in the faith and included in this privilege. This privilege of belonging to God.

Now what kind of relationship is this covenant relationship? It's a word we use a lot in this church. What does it mean? Well let me say what it's not. It is not a contract.

At this time of year there's a lot of talk isn't there about football transfers being made, new contracts being signed. Those contracts are limited aren't they? People are bought for a certain period when they get too old or get injured that contract will expire they'll move on.

There's no contract like that that is only for a short period of time. Neither is it a consumer relationship. You know we're consumers in this society aren't we? We're used to buying products buying into things if we like what's being given to us or we like what's being served.

[10:23] Or we'll move away we'll change brands we'll change our loyalty if we no longer like it. Well that is not what this is. It's not something we go for so long as it suits us.

It's not a contract it's not a consumer relationship rather it's a commitment. Marriage is the great covenant that we still have in this society. Although as the Ashley Madison website is found and many people on it are found not that many people take it seriously anymore either.

But in marriage those people enter into a commitment don't they? It entails responsibilities to one another it's an exclusive commitment but it's a commitment of love and that's what the Lord enters into with his people it is a privilege to be loved by the living God.

And just as a marriage relationship in a sense determines who you are and determines how you live so the privilege of being God's covenant people should determine who we think we are and therefore how we live.

It defines us. Now different things define people in our society don't they? Some people consider themselves to be defined by their class.

[11:36] I'm working class I do this I'm middle class I will live this life. Some people are defined by the house they live in. As I was cycling through Acton this week I saw a new building going up where it says you buy this you don't just buy a house you buy a lifestyle.

Buy a lifestyle investing in Acton you've got to love that haven't you? Man of a lie. Well that's the idea isn't it? You buy this you buy into this is your choice you buy into a whole way of life.

Some people do don't they? Buy into a certain house a certain lifestyle buy into education buy into all sorts of stuff. That's what defines them. Something they're defined by their nationality.

But the Lord says you're primarily defined by your relationship with me by the privilege of being my covenant people. That's what the Israelites would think of as what defines them.

It's what you and I we believers in the Lord Jesus should think of as what defines us. Peter writing to the Christians in the New Testament says this once you were not a people but now you are God's people.

[12:39] Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. mercy. This is what defines you. You are God's people. This is the privilege you have. It's not a burden. It is a privilege.

And with great privileges come great responsibilities don't they? With the privilege of marriage come certain responsibilities. You know what it's like at a wedding? You're at a wedding ceremony you hear the bride promise the groom that she will forsake all others and cling only to the groom. What do you think when you hear those words? Do you think that's very legalistic? That's very restrictive. She's not very free. That's a burden.

No, of course not. We understand that yes, because this is love it entails restrictions. For a marriage to function to enjoy the privileges of a marriage there has to be faithfulness doesn't there? There has to be forsaking all others and clinging only to one other person. We realise that's necessary for love to bring freedom to bring enjoyment and so it is for God's people in this covenant.

[13:47] To enjoy the privilege of being God's people it needs to be an exclusive relationship. It needs to be exclusive so that we can enjoy that privilege and that blessing. That's what Moses is warning the people of here in chapter 29.

It's all about the heart. It's all about the heart. It's not about fulfilling legal obligations any more than a marriage it's about fulfilling a legal obligation to forsake all others. It's about the heart it's about what we love.

So look at verse 18 for a moment. Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clown or tribe whose heart is turning away from the Lord our God to go and serve other gods.

Now the heart in the Old Testament is not just emotions rather it's the centre of the will. It's the centre of the thought the centre of being. But the temptation for Israel then and for us now is that our hearts are tempted are drawn away.

And so Moses in this section deals with three particular temptations that can draw people's hearts away from the true God from this great privilege we have of being God's people. We can be attracted to false gods we can be half-hearted in our commitment to the true God or we can be arrogant in trusting our own reason not God's revelation.

[15:05] So attracted to false gods half-hearted in our commitment or arrogant. So Moses deals first with the attraction to false gods in verse 17. He said you have seen in all our wanderings through the wilderness you have seen their detestable things their idols of wood and stone of silver and gold which were among them.

Moses wants the people to remember that the false gods the nations around worship were indeed detestable detestable to God but also detestable to them if they thought about it for a moment. These false religions were generally fertility religions and involved shrine prostitution or self-harm to try and get the gods to give them fertility or even child sacrifice they were detestable. But how often do we think how detestable the idols of our day are? So we can be seduced by them just as Israel could be seduced by the gods and the nations around them but let's stop and think about it.

Material comfort. Get a good job earn lots of money have comfort. That seems so attractive doesn't it? And yet how many children have sacrificed on the altar of Korea so that people can have their three overseas holidays a year and their nice house?

[16:29] Or what about education? It promises so much it's not a bad thing. And yet again so many children grow up without love because their parents are not there paying for the expense of education or grow up with the pressures of education.

Either it leads them away from the Lord because they have to work so hard to get the exam grade that they're told and promised them so much or the pressure and stress of it can be so much. There are children in our daughter's class who are getting private cheaters aged six. I wonder what pressure is that putting on them? Making education actually a thing that can deliver everything. It explains why universities like Oxford and Cambridge have the highest suicide level rates. Why? Because people have had so much pressure putting on them that when they get to those institutions and find they're no longer top.

They can't cut the mustard. It breaks them. And we all know sexual pleasure is such an idol in this age, isn't it? Yet look at the destruction it brings to families and lives.

[17:41] See, Moses is warning the Israelites about the ugliness of idolatry. Maybe we need to tell ourselves the ugliness of the idols that can easily seduce us. But perhaps a bigger problem for us is the half-heartedness and commitment.

Look at verse 18. Let's look at the half of verse 18. Beware, lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. One who, when he hears the words of the sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, for I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

This will lead to the sweeping away of the moist and the dry alike. Now, in our culture, it's kind of wrong to take anything too seriously, isn't it? It's all right to go to church, but don't take it too seriously.

And so it's easy to sit there and think, well, yeah, I hear there's choice between life and death, but it doesn't matter that much, does it? You know, I come to church, I'll be okay.

I read my Bible occasionally, I'll be okay. I don't want to be too serious about my commitment here. After all, I've got a pension to invest in, I've got other things I need to do in my life.

[18:55] And yet, what does Moses warn the people? Beware. So the Lord sees our hearts. We need to examine our hearts. And as Moses warns here, that that half-heartedness, that nominalism, could lead to the moist and the dry, the whole community being swept.

away. So that is a warning for us too. So the very phrase gets, this very verse gets picked up again in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 15. The writer of the Hebrews is writing to a bunch of Christians who are thinking of packing it all in, going back to Judaism.

Now, they probably didn't think of it like that, they probably thought they could just be faithful to God in another way, in a way that was easier for them, the way that suited them better. But the writer warns them this, Hebrews 12 verse, chapter 12 verse 15, picking up on Deuteronomy chapter 29, says this, See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

So the writer to the Hebrews sees that half-heartedness, a wavering, a going back to what is easier, to what is more comfortable, could actually lead many to fall astray, and many to fail to attain the grace of God.

See, roots get down deep, don't they? I know from digging my own garden, you don't dig the root out deeply. And it just comes back and the flower goes to seed and the root spreads, the weave spreads.

[ 20 : 28 ] And so it can be amongst God's people. That's why the writer to the Hebrews, following on from Moses, is encouraging us to help one another, not to be half-hearted, but to be whole-hearted in our commitment to the God who has been whole-hearted in his commitment to us.

What encourage, how can we do that? Well, let me ask you, what encourages you to be whole-hearted in your commitment to the Lord Jesus? What examples?

What stories? Well, share those with other people. Be that sort of example as well, by God's grace. See, Moses is warning us against half-heartedness to others of being attracted to other idols. But also he wants to, as we look around, he wants to warn us about the arrogance of thinking we can do it our own way, of thinking we can trust in our own reason.

Look at verse 29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. The things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

[ 21 : 43 ] If there is a God who created a whole universe, it stands to reason that he knows a lot more than you and I, doesn't it? There must be things he hasn't told us. But what he has told us is sufficient.

It's all we need to know. But it's a dangerous thing when we think, I'm only going to trust God when I can understand everything about him. I'm only going to believe him if he makes sense to me. If that's what we say, then who in the end do we trust him? We're trusting our own intellect, aren't we? We're making God down to our side. That is not the God of the Bible. We cannot know him fully.

There are mysteries beyond us. But we can know him truly. Because he's revealed to us what we need to know. The secret things belong to us and our children.

So the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever. But we may do the words of this law. And we may trust him and live for him. He's told us what we need to know.

[ 22 : 41 ] So we mustn't be attracted away. We mustn't be half-hearted. We mustn't be arrogant. I think we know it all. But we must trust him. And Moses gives a solemn warning in this passage.

We don't have time to look at it. But in the rest of chapter 29 he spells out what will happen if the people fail to be faithful to the Lord. He says they will be destroyed from the land if they break the covenant.

They will be destroyed. Verse 27. The anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in the book.

Moses is looking ahead to see what could happen. A friend of mine asked me the other day, how come so few people go to church these days? How come so many churches are being closed down?

And I, in my stupidity, gave a long, warbling answer about how thinking has changed over the centuries and how we're now more prone to believe other things.

[ 23 : 41 ] And as I read this, I realised the true answer is not a man-centred answer, but a God-centred answer. The reason churches are now luxury flats and warehouses and things like that are not that society has changed, but actually because God is disciplining his people.

Where the church gave up and was attracted to worshipping the idols of the world around it, where the church has been half-hearted or legalistic and fallen into nominalism, or where the church has sought to be arrogant and explained everything, then God has judged his church and judged the people.

We need to be faithful. It's what Moses is calling Israel to and calling us to. It's a privilege to belong to the living God. It's a real thing he offers us.

But the good news is it's also gracious. Because who of us can actually be faithful in all these ways? Well, let's look on to the start of chapter 13. 13 verses 1 to 14.

You see, this is a gracious privilege, a gracious gift. It is not earned. There is a promise of hope after failure. Look at verse 1 of chapter 13.

[ 24 : 52 ] After all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I set before you, and you call them to mind that I want the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children, and obey his voice that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you.

So here in this chapter, Moses is showing Israel what is going to happen as the Old Testament unfolds. And sure enough, Israel felt we're unfaithful to the covenant. They broke the covenant. So they ended up in exile. And yet the promises of Deuteronomy 30 inspired Daniel to pray in Daniel chapter 9 when in exile. It inspired Ezra and Nehemiah to come back from a comfortable life in exile and Babylon and Persia.

To rebuild Jerusalem and rebuild God's people. It's a promise of restoration for all of us who turn to God after our failures. Not only is it a promise to restore a relationship, it's a promise to transform our hearts.

That's how gracious this promise is. Look at verse 6. The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

[ 26 : 13 ] Now what does that mean to circumcise the heart? Does that mean a religious ritual? No. It points to God doing something that the ritual of circumcision only pointed to.

And it's something that God does not in the Old Testament, but it only comes to fulfillment of in the New Testament through the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

So in Colossians chapter 2 verse 11, Paul says this, in Christ also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ. The idea is that as Christ was cut off, died a bloody death outside the walls of Jerusalem, so God can do a work in our hearts, cutting off our sin, cutting off the inbuilt rebellion in our hearts, so that we can love.

This is how gracious God is. Grace restores us to himself, and grace transforms us, so that we can be the people he has called us to be. And that was a promise that was there in the Old Testament.

[ 27 : 19 ] As Moses says in verse 14, this word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. That was true in the sense that this word, this commandment he gave them, all pointed forward to the Lord Jesus.

All the sacrifices of the Old Covenant pointed forward to a great sacrifice that would come one day and could truly deal with sins. All the promises, that promised so much, pointed forward to the promises being fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Even the promises here in Deuteronomy, back in chapter 10, 16, the Lord said, circumcise therefore the full skin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. Even that command that God held out to them should have caused the people to cry out for God's grace.

That's why Paul can take these verses in Romans chapter 10 and say that these verses here in Deuteronomy are the promise of the righteousness of faith that comes through Jesus.

So what do these verses teach us? They teach us that God's promise of life is gracious. It is a gracious gift, not something we earn. It is a gracious gift to restore us to himself and to transform our hearts.

[ 28 : 35 ] And that comes only through Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection. So this offer of life is real. It is a privilege. It is gracious.

And finally, and ridiculously briefly, it is life that is all or nothing at all. It is a choice that is all or nothing at all.

Down to verse 19 again. Verses 15 to 19, Moses reached this great climax of his speech. So verse 19, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land the Lord your God swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give them.

It is an urgent choice. It is a real choice. Four times in his last paragraph, Moses says today. In a sense it is a daily choice. It is a choice we renew daily to turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance. [ 29 : 46 ] It is a choice about where we think we will find life. Will we find it in comfort, in pleasure, in wealth? And will we find it in the Lord Jesus?

It is exactly the choice that Jesus held out to the crowds in Mark chapter 8. He called the crowd to him with his disciples and said, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. It is the same choice that Moses set before Israel. Life with God's covenant or death your own way.

Life through denying yourself, through denying self-determination, choosing God's way to tell us how to live. Life through denying ourselves, giving up our self-reliance, relying on God's promises to sustain us.

Life of walking God's way, taking up your cross and following me, says Jesus. Life of self-sacrifice, which may include losing face, losing friends, losing respect for the gospel, losing comfort from the gospel.

[ 31 : 01 ] Certainly turning away from all that promises life that would actually lead to death. And yet that's choosing real life, isn't it? We have an email this week from a friend of ours, who none of you know.

I'll call her Sarah, if that is not her name, and she lives many hundreds of miles away. She's a young lady in her early thirties, and obviously would love to be married.

She said this in her email. I shed a lot of tears this last year. She said earlier that she'd chosen the wrong man at one point. But she hadn't said this. I shed a lot of tears this last year.

But I rejoice in all that God is doing. He is so patient with me, with all my ups and downs. I've had to make some difficult choices this year, choosing to follow him and not follow my own heart.

And it's cost a lot. But I know that I am his. Nothing else is worth it in comparison to that.

[ 32 : 00 ] See, Sarah knows that real life is found in Jesus. that the real privilege is being loved by the living God, not by someone else. She knows it is a gracious offer.

He is patient with all our ups and downs. And she knows it's all or nothing at all. It's cost a lot, but nothing else is worth it in comparison to that.

See, she faced the same choice Moses gave the people, the same choice we face. See, I set before you today life and good, death and evil. Therefore, choose life that you and your offspring may live.

Let's pray.