

Deuteronomy 29:29; 30:11-15      “What We Can and Cannot Know”

Intro. When I was a teenager seeking the truth of God, I remember someone showing me Deuteronomy 29:29. There we see that God has not chosen to reveal everything to us about the future, about Himself, and about the mysteries of the universe. God is sovereign and it is not up to us to question what He chooses to reveal or not reveal. I hope you will always remember this verse as I have. I will share more about this verse as we get into the message.

Now let's put this verse in context. In chapter 29 God warns of the horrors and darkness that would result from disobedience to His covenant of law. Yet in chapter 30 He gives His people hope for the future if they will repent and turn back to Him. After all, God is a merciful and gracious God. V.29 acts as a cushion between these two extremes and offers a warning against trying to delve into the mysteries of God's judgment on the one hand and His gracious offer to forgive.

Instead of focusing on what God has chosen *not* to reveal, this text of Scripture calls upon us to focus on what God *has* chosen to reveal and respond accordingly. I believe this message is an important foundational message for everyone in your relationship with God. I hope you will listen carefully. Now the first main truth I want to share is this:

## I. SOME THINGS GOD HAS NOT REVEALED TO US

In v.29 Moses says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God...” The Hebrew word translated “secret” (*cathar*) more often than not refers to something or someone that is hidden from view. On several occasions it refers to information that is hidden or not disclosed.<sup>1</sup> This same word is used in Prov. 25:2, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

We should not even expect that God would reveal *all* things to us. Paul said in Rom. 11:33-34, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD?....” God knows all things and we cannot even comprehend all that He knows. The finite cannot fully understand the infinite. How could we understand His providential dealings? Why do the righteous suffer at times more than unbelieving sinners? Why did God permit Satan to rebel and spread evil in the universe? How can we understand the doctrine of the Trinity, or how the doctrine of predestination reconciles with free will? You will find more questions like this in the book of Job. God reveals much of what we *can* understand but reserves for Himself what we cannot or should not know.

Our son Andrew went to Purdue University for his Master's degree. He studied an advanced form of math that was far more theoretical and abstract compared to what I will had been familiar with in high school. He tried to explain a little of what he was studying, but it was totally beyond my comprehension. There was really no point in trying to explain it to me. Even so, there are certain things about God and His dealings with us that are just beyond our understanding. There is no point in Him even attempting to reveal such things to us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Num. 5:13; 1 Sam. 20:2; Ps. 19:12; 119:19; Prov. 27:5; Isa 29:15; 40:27.

There is likely a contextual reason why this issue was brought up here. The verses immediately preceding v.29 deal with Israel's future in terms of judgment and calamity. While God revealed the future consequences of disobedience and disloyalty, the timing and the means of accomplishing His purposes remained within His sovereign discretion, and would not be revealed in advance. God also chooses not to reveal full explanations for His dealings with man, including the workings of Providence. Even the mercy and grace expressed in chapter 30 would seem mysterious to many after so great a rebellion expressed in chapter 29. In essence God said, "Leave the future to me. You should focus on your present duty to Me." Indeed, God is a loving Father and we can leave what is unknown about the future into His loving hands.

So don't expect God to reveal all of His mysteries to us. Don't expect to understand all of the ways of God. Just trust in Him that He will do what is right.

The second truth from our text of Scripture that I want to share with you is this:

## II. GOD HAS REVEALED WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

I am glad that God is not silent and remote from us. He has chosen to reveal important truths to us. Moses says in the middle of v.29, "those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." All that God wants His people to know is contained in His verbal and written revelation through His prophets and other authors of Scripture. The "things revealed" especially refer to the book of Deuteronomy, including the revelations of God's character, as well as His commands, promises, and warnings of judgment. Furthermore, it refers to all of the books written by Moses under the inspiration of God. This text reminds us that God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself.

Now there are several truths about God's revelation that we can glean from our text of Scripture:

A. God's Revelation Is Purposeful – God gives us His revelation, not to satisfy our curiosity, but that we may know Him and that we might have a guide for faith and life. We see this in the last of v.29, "that we may do all the words of this law." There are other purposes in God's revelation to us. He reveals to us our sinful condition by the law (Rom. 3:20; 7:7) and the way of salvation by the gospel. He reveals how to experience His blessings.

God has a purpose in giving us the truths found in Scripture. Is His purpose being fulfilled in your life?

B. God's Revelation Is Authoritative – In the last of v.29 he speaks of God's "law." In v.11 he speaks of "this commandment which I command you today..." The fact that the Word of God is to be obeyed shows that it is authoritative. It is the Word of our Creator, the Lord of the universe. His word is not to be ignored or treated with indifference.

Parents, when you give commands to your children, you expect them to respect your authority and do what you say. Even so, we should respect the authority of God's Word.

C. God's Revelation Is Attainable – It is not beyond your reach. It is not beyond your understanding. Look over to chapter 30, vv.11-13, "For this commandment<sup>2</sup> which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say,

---

<sup>2</sup> This single word "commandment" occurs regularly in Deuteronomy as a term denoting the entire covenant text (cf. 4:2; 5:29; 7:9; 8:2,6; 11:8,13,22,27; 13:4,18; 15:5; 26:13,18; 27:1; 28:1,9,13; 30:8) - Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, p.286, quoted by Merrill, 392.

‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’” Here we see that:

1. It Is Not Too Mysterious (v.11b) – The Hebrew word translated “mysterious” (*pala*) refers to something too wonderful or extraordinary to understand. Contrary to the inscrutable and idiomatic ways of the pagan gods, the Lord’s purposes and will for His people are crystal-clear.<sup>3</sup> Every man knows what it is to love so we can understand the greatest commandment, which is to love God. Every child knows what obedience means. The practical duties which pertain to virtue and well-being are so plain that even a child may understand. We are not dependent upon philosophers and theologians to understand the plain truths of the Word of God. Any religion that claims to have spiritual truth that is only available from the spiritually elite is to be rejected.

Furthermore, the *language* of God’s revelation is not couched in deeply theological, incomprehensible or abstract terms but in language that is vivid, clear and should be easy to understand. Only dishonest and sinful minds state that the revelation of God is too difficult to understand. Any difficulty is within a man and not in the revelation itself. This reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 11:25-26, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.” What Jesus taught was simple enough for children to understand but it was rejected by the scribes and Pharisees due to their prideful self-righteousness.

I believe there is a lesson for Bible preachers and teachers and even seminary professors. If God wanted His revelation to be attainable and understandable to the common man, then that is how we should present it. This is especially true when it comes to presenting the gospel to someone.

2. It Is Not Distant (vv.11-12) - Imagine a person embarking on a long journey to retrieve God’s command and then returning with it to teach it to the people. That is *not* what God requires. Though God is transcendent, His revelation is near and attainable. Though God’s revelation originates from heaven, we need not go there to get it. God has literally brought it down to us.

Even so, you do not have to travel across the ocean to Israel to obtain God’s Word. It is as near as your Bible. If you don’t have one you can easily get one from a church, a bookstore, or even from Walmart or Amazon! God’s Word is as near as your television set, your radio, your computer or smart phone. Most people in America do not have to drive far to find a Bible preacher or teacher.

3. It Is Near (v.14) - God came down and manifested His presence on the mountain before the nation of Israel. He revealed His law and even wrote it plainly and simply on tablets of stone. He gave additional revelation to His prophet Moses and for the next 1000 years raised up more prophets to live among the people and speak God’s Word to them. God even took on human flesh and lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ. That is how near God made the Word of God to us!

Doesn’t this suggest that it is God’s will that we bring the Word of God near to people? Shouldn’t we bring the Word of God, the Gospel, to the nations?

Notice in the last of v.14 that God’s Word can be so near that it is “in your mouth and in your heart.” If we learn God’s Word and even commit it to memory, it will be in our hearts. It

---

<sup>3</sup> The theological term for this is the perspicuity of God’s Word.

should also be in our mouths as we teach and quote Scripture, and even use God's Word to resist temptation (Mt. 4:1-11).

When the apostle Paul referenced this Scripture in Romans 10:6-8, one point he was making was the fact that just as the law was not too mysterious or difficult to attain, even so the gospel is near and attainable for all. Salvation by faith is simple enough for a child to understand!

So don't have the wrong attitude about the revelation of God in Scripture. You can learn it, understand it, and benefit from it. Don't think for a moment that it is beyond your reach or beyond understanding. His revelation is intended to be clear and near to you.

Another truth about God's revelation is this:

D. His Revelation Is Doable – This is indicated by the last of v.14, “that you may do it.” God has not mocked us by expecting us to do the impossible. At least *with His help* we can obey His commands, beginning with the command to love Him, and we can exercise faith in Him. If Israel fails it will not be because the bar of obedience is impossibly high, but because they are *unwilling* to keep it. The first generation of Israelites that took possession of the land was able to keep the covenant well enough. Even in days of apostasy God always has His remnant of believers who are faithful and obedient.

So when God reveals His expectations, don't think that they are impossible and there is no point in trying. Trust God, and He will help you!

E. His Revelation Is Progressive - That truth is not addressed here but it is obvious from the fact that our Scripture today references only the law of Moses, but after Moses God continued to reveal more and more truth through His prophets. The ultimate and final revelation for the current age has been given by Jesus Christ and His apostles, according to Hebrews 1:1-3. In Colossians 1:26 Paul speaks of “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.” For Christians today, our focus is not upon the law but upon the gospel. John 1:17-18 says, “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Thankfully, the day is coming when we will know even more, whether upon death or the return of Christ. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13:12, “... Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” As the old song says, “We'll understand it better by-and-by.”

How blessed we are to live in the fullness of the New Testament revelation of God! Are you availing yourself of this blessing? Well that leads to my final point:

### III. WHAT WE ARE TO DO WITH GOD'S REVELATION

Our text gives us three things we should do with the precious revelation from God. First:

A. Claim His Truth As Our Own - Moses says in the middle of v.29, “but those things which are revealed belong to us....” The question is, will we listen to his voice? Will we read the Scriptures He has provided for us? Furthermore, God's revelation does not become our own until we understand it, act upon it, and our character is molded by it. When people can see that your life is impacted by God's Word, then His Word has truly become your own.

Can you truly say that you have made God's Word your own?

B. Teach God's Revelation to Our Children - Moses also says in the middle of v.29 that the revelation of God is given "to our children forever..." That edition implies that we are not to keep sacred truths to ourselves but to pass them on to others, beginning with our children.

It is the responsibility of preachers, missionaries, Bible teachers, Christian parents and others to teach and share the Word of God. It is your responsibility to take the next step:

C. Act on God's Revelation - Moses says in the last of v.29 that God's revelation is given "that we may do all the words of this law." This thought is repeated in the last of v.14 of chapter 30. There he speaks of God's revelation being attainable and near "that you may do it." We should and must heed the revealed truth of God. God's revelation is not given just for information or to satisfy our curiosity. It is given that we might act upon it with faith and obedience. Right belief or mere possession of the truth is barren until it brings forth active obedience. James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." As we have seen, there are no excuses for not doing so.

This passage (vv.11-14) is referenced in Rom. 10:6-8. Paul applies this Scripture to the gospel of salvation.<sup>4</sup> As the law was a revelation from God, so also is the gospel. While in the original context the response required was obedience, Paul applies this Scripture to say that the gospel requires a faith response. In fact, to believe in Christ was at times spoken of as an act of obedience (Acts 4:12; 5:32; 6:7; Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

Conclusion: So I call upon you not to worry about the mysteries God has not revealed. Instead, focus on learning and acting on what God has revealed in the Scriptures, and especially His ultimate revelation through His Son Jesus and His apostles.

Have you heeded God's call to confess your sins, repent of your sins, and place your faith in His Son as Lord and Savior? If not, why not today?

Most in my audience have made that faith commitment. Are you actively learning God's Word, and seeking to obey God's will as revealed in His Word. If not, make a recommitment to the Lord today!

Sources: Donard F. Ackland, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1964); Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2019; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); H. D. M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may listen free at [www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker](http://www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker). Videos of a number of Dr. Felker's sermons are available at [www.swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com/resources/videos](http://www.swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com/resources/videos). Dr. Felker's email address is [S+Felker&2@aol.com](mailto:S+Felker&2@aol.com) (remove signs).

---

<sup>4</sup> Thus, he does not give an exact quotation. Rather, it is based loosely on the Septuagint.