

Deuteronomy 30:11–14

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Moses concluded his final address by telling the Israelites that God's commandments in this covenant are not beyond their ability to understand and obey. God's word is very near to them. So, they must believe it, speak it and do it. The purpose of the covenant is for Israel to live by it. That can only come from the heart.

These last ten verses of chapter 30 form the conclusion to Moses' last speech to the people of Israel. In his speech beginning in chapter 5, Moses presented numerous commandments and laws that comprised the Horeb (Sinai) covenant renewal document. Moses was presenting this to the second generation, who were camped east of the Jordan, preparing to enter the land, after the first generation of Israelites who had refused to enter the land had died in the wilderness, those of military age and older (Deuteronomy 2:16). The second generation agreed to abide by the Horeb covenant at the end of chapter 26 (Deuteronomy 26:17).

Then, beginning in Deuteronomy 29:1, Moses added an additional covenant. From Deuteronomy 29:1 until Deuteronomy 30:10, God added an agreement that was applicable to the second generation as well as their descendants. In this covenant, God added that a future generation would, in fact, violate the covenant, and when they did, they would be expelled from the land. But God also made clear that when they repented, He would gather them back to the land, no matter how far they might have been scattered. Moses also added that God would circumcise the hearts of that future generation.

Now this added covenant is proposed to the Israelites of the second generation; those who will enter the land. Moses offers the basic proposition to Israel. In this proposition, Moses makes it clear that Israel knows what is right in their hearts. The key question is whether they will acknowledge what is right by speaking it, then choosing to do it.

Moses begins his invitation to enter this added covenant by saying that *for this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach* (v. 11). Unlike the Horeb (Sinai) covenant, this added

covenant will not be agreed to by the people at a point in time. Rather, it will remain open ended. It will be for the people to decide each day whether to do what they know in their hearts is right.

In saying that *this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you*, Moses made it clear that God's covenantal laws were both understandable as well as something they could live by. There was no guesswork involved in figuring out the meaning of His laws. Nor were they inaccessible or unreachable. This was in stark contrast to the inscrutable and strange ways of the pagan gods.

It was quite clear that doing right by others, respecting their property, personhood, and families would lead to a great and beneficial society. This is common sense. It is not hard to understand. The entire application of the law could be summed up as "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31). That is not a difficult concept to either understand or apply. Each person clearly has built into them how to love themselves. What is required is to simply apply that knowledge to others.

Moses used two illustrations to emphasize his point in v. 11, that these commandments are readily understandable. First, he stated that the LORD's commandment *is not in heaven*, implying that what the LORD said was unreachable. So, no one *should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'* (v. 12). The author's point is that the Israelites had no need to try to *go up to heaven* (where the law originated) to retrieve the law. They did not need to have an angel come down from heaven and explain it to them. They had already heard it because God had given His law to His covenant people there on the plains of Moab. And they knew in their heart what was right. It was simple, and needed no explanation.

Secondly, Moses stated that the LORD's commandment was not *beyond the sea*, that you *should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'* (v. 13). Again, Moses pointed out the fact that God's commandment was not inaccessible or difficult to fathom. No one needed to *cross the sea* to get it. They did not need a missionary, or foreign expert to come explain it. It was readily understandable.

In fact, the commands of God were close by, and easily understandable. Moses told the Israelites that His *word is very near you* (v. 14). But how *near* was it? It was close, and easily accessed.

This was, in part, because the core of the application of God's commandment was to love others as they loved themselves. Implied is that everyone has an intrinsic ability to love themselves. Therefore, it should be relatively easy to assess how to treat others. Just ask "How would I want to be treated?" Then do that for the neighbor.

The truth was *in their mouth and in their heart*. This stresses the fact that God's commandment had a constant presence in Israel's lives. *It was in their heart* (Deuteronomy 6:6) because God had given them the commands, and the commands were simply pointing out realities about what it means to treat others as you want yourself to be treated. It was in their *mouth* when they spoke what was in their heart. The nearness of God's commandment made it possible for them to *observe it*. It was not beyond their reach. The sequence is to believe, speak, then do the commands. Jesus told us that these commands can be summed up as "love God and love others" (Mark 12:20-31).

In short, the Suzerain (Ruler) God had given His covenantal laws to His chosen people and commanded them to live by them. These laws were easily understood and not too difficult to obey. In addition, the Israelites were told that when they obeyed God's commandments and statutes, the Israelites would experience rich blessing. It was *very near* to them, on their lips and in their hearts. Therefore, they could live by it if they so chose. It was clear that the choice was theirs. It was not a matter of comprehension, but a matter of willingness.

In the section of Romans concerning God's dealings with Israel (Romans 9 – 11), the apostle Paul used this Deuteronomy 30 passage to illustrate "righteousness based on faith." He summarizes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 with a brief chiasm:

A that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord,

B and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

B' for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness,

A' and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

This center of any chiasm is the primary point. In this chiasm, the primary point is that true righteousness stems from living by faith. The chiasm could be further simplified as:

A: Confess

B: Believe (have faith)

B' Believe (walk in faith)

A' Confess

The salvation or deliverance that confession brings in Romans 10 is the same as the salvation or deliverance in Deuteronomy 30. Israel was chosen as God's people due to God's love, and nothing else (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8). Similarly, New Testament believers are born again spiritually as children of God through faith alone (John 3:14-15; Romans 4:3-4; 5:1). Israel was delivered from the adverse consequences of disobedience when they believed, confessed, and kept the provisions of God's covenant.

Similarly, Paul argues in Romans that God's children are delivered from the adverse consequences of sin when we believe, confess, then walk/do the things that are of the obedience of faith. Some of the adverse consequences of sin noted by Paul are listed below:

- Being given over to addictions from our own flesh (Romans 1:24,26)
- Being given over to poor thinking (Romans 1:28)
- Slavery to our flesh, and sin, which is a harsh master, who pays a "salary" in death (Romans 6:12-16, 23)

Paul offers the believers in Rome (whose faith is famous, Romans 1:8) the same choice that Moses offers Israel. As chosen people of God, secure in His love, fully accepted as His people, will we follow God's ways, which lead to great blessing. Or will we choose our own path, and reap destruction?

This passage in Romans 10 is, arguably, the apex of Paul's argument against his competing Jewish authorities. It echoes the theme verse from chapter 1:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”
(Romans 1:16-17)

In this theme verse of Romans (Romans 1:16-17), it is clear that the way to achieve a righteous life is to live a life of faith. The progression of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 is:

- believe,
- speak,
- do the provisions of God’s covenant.

Paul’s progression is the same, with the “do” implied. If we believe, and confess (speak) it is presumed we will do (Romans 10:9-10).

The righteousness being pursued in Romans is the experience of righteousness. Paul’s letter to the church at Rome was written to believers whose faith was famous throughout the world (Romans 1:8). They had already been declared righteous in the presence of God, through faith.

The question now was a choice of whether to LIVE by faith, and exhibit/experience righteousness in daily life. Therefore the “salvation” being spoken of in Romans 10:9-10 is about being saved from the daily power of sin reigning in us through our flesh. Paul spends much of Romans speaking of the flesh of the believer, and our need to choose to walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh (Romans 8:1-8). In doing this, New Testament believers are delivered/saved from the adverse consequences of sin.

In this way the New Testament reflects the old. Paul makes clear that becoming a member of God’s family is solely a matter of faith. It is receiving a gift from God through faith in Christ (Romans 3:23; 4:3-4; 5:17). That gift is irrevocable, as are all gifts of God (Romans 11:29). Similarly, God chose Israel to be His people not because of any righteousness they had, but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8). God is always our inheritance (Romans 8:17a).

As with Israel and with New Testament believers, the inheritance of the blessings of being in covenant with God depends upon our choices;

specifically whether we choose to walk in faith. As Paul states in Romans 1, when we choose to follow the flesh we get God's wrath, which is allowing us to have what we wanted, and being given over to our flesh, with the resulting adverse consequences (Romans 1:24,26,28). On the other hand, if we walk in the obedience of Christ, and suffer as He suffered, we are promised the blessing of inheriting all He inherited as a reward for His faithfulness (Romans 8:17b).

When Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in the Romans 10 passage, he applies "Christ" as the one who is being called from heaven or from over the sea in order to explain righteousness. But this of course is not necessary, for Christ is within us (Colossians 2:27). This adds an additional element to Moses, who says "You already know in your heart what is right." In the New Testament, we have God dwelling within, telling and leading us to what is right. The question is "Who will we listen to?" Whom will we obey? The Spirit or the flesh? (Galatians 5:16-17).

Paul contrasts a righteousness "based on faith" (like Deuteronomy 30:11-14) with a righteousness "based on law." Paul asserts that the righteousness of the law does not achieve righteousness (Romans 9:31-32).

To illustrate the righteousness "based on law," Paul quotes from Leviticus 18. In that chapter, Moses cites the exploitive behavior common to the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures. Many of the rules appear to close various loopholes (don't commit incest with a sister, or half sister, whether born at home or abroad). The point seems to be that you will never be able to bring about righteousness by making rules and closing loopholes. So long as people's hearts are bent on breaking rules, they will find a justification.

True righteousness begins in the heart. Believe, speak (or think/dwell), then do. That is the means to walk by faith.

This was true in ancient Israel. It was the case for this added covenant, that God gave to the second generation, the generation that entered the land (Deuteronomy 29:1). It is true for New Testament believers, as Paul notes in Romans.

Biblical Text:

¹¹ For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.