

Taking God Seriously: 3. Don't Overestimate Yourself!

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[0 : 00] Well, we come now to our Bible reading. So let's turn, please, to Deuteronomy, chapter 29. And Willie is continuing with his preaching through this great book, The Last of the Five Books of Moses.

So Deuteronomy, chapter 29, and you'll find that in the Big Bibles on page 171. 171. So Deuteronomy, chapter 29.

These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land.

The great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and those great wonders. But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

[1 : 14] I've led you 40 years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet. You've not eaten bread, and you've not drunk wine or strong drink, but you may know that I am the Lord your God.

And when you came to this place, Sion, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, came out against us to battle, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.

Therefore, keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God, the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your 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, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

It is not with you alone that I am 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.

You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed, and you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them.

[2 : 55] Beware, lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe, whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations.

Beware, lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.

And the Lord will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law. And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the Lord God has made it sick, the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and wrath, all the nations will say, why has the Lord done thus to this land?

What caused the heat of this great anger? Then people will say, it is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them.

[4 : 45] Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book. And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land as they are this day.

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

Amen. And may the message of this come home to our hearts today. Amen. Well, please do turn to Deuteronomy chapter 29.

And if we can have the power switched on, then you'll be able to hear. Good. Thank you. I suppose all gospel preachers must be repetitive. Not in the sense of saying thousands of different things just in the same boring, predictable way each time.

That's very off-putting and dull, isn't it? But rather in repeating the same constant central message of God in a thousand different ways, to captivate people's hearts and minds with the sheer wonder of the unchanging gospel, of the grace of God in the face of the sin of man.

[6 : 15] And Moses was indeed just such a preacher, never diverting ever from the heart of that unchanging truth, but pressing at home in ever new ways, with urgency, with vigor, with real color, to the people that he was called to teach.

And here in chapters 29 and 30, we have Moses' final address, his third and final address to the people in this book.

Verse 2, Moses summoned all Israel and spoke to them. And we have yet another message, again, this time a sort of summary of the whole gospel, the whole covenant.

And it's an urgent message, and again, it's about the heart of the whole thing, the sin of man in the face of the grace of God. And a real personal challenge to obedience today.

Now, we've seen that word so often, haven't we, all through this book. Remember chapter 27, and the emphasis there on the permanence of God's word, written, plastered on those stones as they went into the promised land.

[7 : 24] And therefore, because permanent, perennially relevant to God's people in every single generation. And that is so evident here. Look at verse 2, it's a word for all Israel.

And again in verse 10, all of you today. And notice also verse 15, also, whoever is not yet here today. In other words, all future generations of God's people forever.

Derek Kidna says, God's covenant refuses to be relegated to the past. It binds each new generation, summoned to take the oath of allegiance. That's the sworn covenant of verse 12.

And it reaches outward, he says, and forward to him who is not with us here yet today. Just as Jesus' prayer in John 17. Do you remember?

He prays not for these only, his disciples, but those who will believe through their word. So Kidna says, it embraces the whole circle of the covenanted through space and time.

[8 : 26] And you see, what Moses speaks is the eternal gospel. It's the unchanging message of God that is written for us. And what he's saying is this, don't ever overestimate yourselves.

That's what he's saying here in chapter 29. As if some of you somehow don't need to hear God's gracious warnings. Don't ever overestimate yourself. But neither, as he goes on to say in chapter 30, neither ever must you underestimate the God of grace.

Because it is truly sufficient God's grace for everyone who will obediently have faith in his covenant. We'll come to chapter 39 next time.

But today our focus is here on chapter 29. And it is again a chapter of warning, isn't it? To help us to see the obstacles that all sinful people face to true faith and obedience to the call of God.

And it's a warning so that we will not stumble. So that we will not fall prey. As that wilderness generation so often did. Paul speaks very clearly, doesn't he, in those terms in 1 Corinthians 10.

[9 : 36] About why these scriptures are preserved for us. In the context there, he's speaking about doing everything he can to avoid putting stumbling blocks to the gospel in front of people.

And ensuring that all believers will run, he says, so as to obtain. And he recognizes his own limitations. His own need for real disciplined faith.

So that he says, having preached to others, I myself might not be disqualified. Well, my goodness, if Paul doesn't overestimate himself, how much less should we?

And he tells, doesn't he, directly, he tells New Testament Christians that all these things written here in our chapter and others like it are written for our example.

So that we will not desire evil as they did. Don't be mistaken, Paul says. They were real spiritual people. They were a real church.

[10 : 30] They were baptized into Moses. They drank from the spiritual rock that is Christ, just as you do. And yet many fell because they were overtaken by temptation.

They stumbled into disobedience. Their hearts were lured away from God's truth. So don't overestimate your own spirituality. Don't think that the human nature that so often floored them won't floor you and can't floor you if you don't keep on humbly submitting yourself in obedient faith to God.

In our daily readings in Exodus on Monday morning, if you're reading them, you'll have read these words. Advance in the Christian things means nothing more or less than a repeated coming to this point.

Dying again and again to self-trust in order to live unto God. So take heed, says Paul, to the New Testament church.

Listen to Moses. All of this is written for our instruction. If you think you're standing firm, take heed lest you fall. Don't overestimate yourself. And we need to understand the obstacles that can so easily floor us.

[11 : 46] And in the words of Hebrews 12, we need to throw off the sin that so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race that is marked out for us today. So we're all standing today, here this morning, before the Lord our God, just as Israel was.

So let's hear his voice and not harden our hearts, either through deafness to his word or defiance in the face of his word or distraction from what God's word to us is really all about.

The first thing Moses warns about is deafness. Deafness and blindness to God's clear revelation of himself. Don't let deafness stop you doing the truth of the gospel, he's shouting aloud in the first 15 verses here.

Look at verses 2 to 4. They bear witness, don't they, to the tragic blindness to Israel of the meaning of her history so often and the deafness to God's repeated overtures of grace to them.

You've seen everything, says Moses, and yet you see nothing. Verse 3, Your eyes saw great signs and wonders. And yet, verse 4, to this day you remain deaf and blind.

[13 : 03] It's a tragic charge, isn't it? But it echoes all the way through Israel's history. So the prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years later in Isaiah chapter 1, says from the Lord, The ox knows his master, the donkey his master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. The Lord Jesus himself, who showed mighty signs and wonders, who spoke like never man spoke, and yet he says to his people Israel, It is all hidden from your eyes.

You did not know the time of your visitation. And you see here, Moses says that they have all the present testimony of what happened in the past, the wonders in Egypt, the signs that God performed all through the wilderness generation, verses 2 and 3.

And more recently, verses 5 and 6 and 7, the great victories you've just seen with your own eyes. All that God has done. And yet still, verse 4, look, they're spiritually blind.

They're deaf. They're dense. They're hard of heart. It seems so extraordinary. And yet, is it not just so typically human?

[14 : 20] It's so easy to be the recipient of so much goodness, so much blessing from God, and yet, never to actually acknowledge His goodness. Never even to acknowledge Him at all.

That's the story of our world. But it's a very sobering thought here, don't you think? Though we're being told, you can know redemptive history, and yet never know the Redeemer Himself.

You can know all about the Bible, all about the big story of the Bible, all about the Gospel. You can teach it to others. And yet, never realize that all this knowledge is meant to lead you personally to enter into personal covenant with Him, the Redeemer.

That's the language of verse 12, isn't it? You must enter in yourself. That's what it's for. You can be around church all your life, He's saying, and you can know it all, and yet you can know nothing because you don't actually truly know Him, the Lord, yourself.

You've seen everything, and yet you've seen nothing. You're blind, you're deaf to God's voice, says Moses. And you see, the reason you do not see, He says here, is because you will not see.

[15 : 40] Because your hearts are not willing to submit to His commands. Now, it's true, as verse 4 says here, very clearly, only God can open eyes and ears and hearts.

He is sovereign. But it's also clear here, isn't it, that if your eyes and ears or hearts are not open, then it is not God's fault. It's our fault when we don't see and hear and understand.

It's only a willing blindness that can reject the plain and the powerful truth of God. God's revelation is plain, but we suppress the truth, is what the Apostle Paul says.

It's plain because God has made it plain. So we're without excuse. We foolishly and sinfully darken our own hearts, he says.

And God's revelation, you see, must lead to response. We'll come to that in verse 29. The things revealed are for us to do. But that's so clear here also in verse 9.

[16 : 44] Look, therefore keep the word of this covenant and do them that the Lord may prosper you. In verses 10 to 12, just the same, you're standing here today, all of you who have seen and heard everything that God has revealed and done.

Why? Verse 12, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant with the Lord your God. That is, you may submit to his rule and his lordship over your lives.

You see, the revelation that you hear and see is meant to lead you to respond in obedient faith and trust to God. And it's in that submission and in that alone that your eyes and your heart will be opened to true relationship with him.

It's that that will bring you real spiritual sight. Remember the story of Naaman in Elisha's time, that proud Syrian soldier who had leprosy and he was outraged when the word of God came through the prophet and said, go and wash in the dirty Jordan River.

He was affronted but his servant prevailed on him and at last it was when he went and obeyed the voice of God and washed in that river that suddenly his eyes were opened and he saw that he was cleansed of leprosy.

[18 : 01] As he obeyed, God's restoring life flowed into him. In the submission comes the spiritual sight.

But if you will not submit, you will never truly see. Because it's only the eyes and ears of penitent faith that can heed the call to enter, that can find the door of entry into the life of God.

Isn't that what Jesus constantly said? For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. Why is that? Because he says, yes, there are many who cry, Lord, Lord, but it's the one who does the will of the Father who will enter.

It's the one who hears these words of mine and does them. Submitting truly to God. Only he is the one who will not collapse like a house built on the sand.

Only God can give eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand. God says, Jesus, he will give them not, not to the proud, the wise and understanding in their own eyes whose hearts are hard, but to the humble who come to him like little children knowing that they have nothing to offer, but they need their father to meet all their needs.

[19 : 30] He gives it to those who heed his call to come, to take my yoke upon you and learn of me, to submit to my rule because it is a good and a gracious rule.

It is, as verse 9 says here, it is the way to true prosperity, to life with God. God reveals himself so that we will respond to his revelation.

And it is as we respond that we receive more of his revelation. That's what Jesus goes on to say there in Matthew's gospel after those words in chapter 11 where he praises God that these things have been hidden from the wise and the proud in their own wisdom, but he has revealed them to those who humbly come with childlike faith.

And Jesus says to those, he says, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given.

The one who has not, even that which he has will be taken away. That is what he's saying is the more you submit to God's revelation, the more you obey him in humble, penitent faith, the more you will be able to see.

[20 : 48] And the more you refuse to submit to God, the less you will be able to see. Jesus quotes Isaiah's words too.

You will indeed hear, but never understand. You will indeed see, but never persevere, for this people's heart has grown dull, hard. They will not understand with their hearts, he says, and turn to him and obey him.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, blessed are your ears, for they hear. That's what he says to those who are heeding him, who are following him, who are submitting to his lordship, who are bearing fruit in real faith.

These, he says, are like the seed that falls on the good ground. Those who hear the word of God and understand it and take it in and bear fruit and yield thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

And Moses, preaching of the gospel here in Deuteronomy 29 is absolutely no different. If you are to see, he says, you must submit.

[21 : 53] All of you. All of you. That's the point, isn't it, of verses 10 to 15 here. All of you, the greatest to the least, the head of the tribes, the leaders of the tribes, right down to the hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Men and women, oldest to youngest, all, verse 12, must enter into sworn covenant with the Lord personally. All must respond humbly in obedient faith, seeking the Lord's grace to open their eyes, to open their heart, to give them the knowledge of salvation and the knowledge of the Savior himself.

That's the only way to true spiritual sight. It's the only way to real salvation. The psalmist of the long psalm, Psalm 119, knew that, didn't he, as well as anybody.

All the way through that psalm, you have these same two prayers repeated again and again in different ways. Lord, open my eyes and Lord, give me life. Open thou mine eyes that I may see wondrous things out of thy law and give me life according to thy word.

That's the prayer, isn't it, of the penitent heart? That's the prayer of real gospel faith that knows the light of God and the life of God's grace can only be received by empty hands in humble, obedient faith.

[23 : 19] And all, says Jesus, and all, says Moses, from the greatest to the least, all must enter that way through the narrow gate of hearing and doing these words of mine, says the Lord.

Therefore, verse 9, don't let deafness to his words stop you doing the truth of the gospel. Keep the words of this covenant and do them that you may prosper in all that you do.

All must enter into this sworn covenant with all its privilege and with all its responsibilities. See, it's no good saying, oh, I go to a church where the leaders are committed to preaching the gospel.

But you must enter yourself, says Moses, into the sworn covenant with God. Leaders and elders and all the rest have got to be joined by all the men, all the women, all the children, everybody in covenant with God.

Nor can a leader say, oh, well, but I'm a leader in a church that's true to the gospel. And God says, yes, you are, but you also must enter. Isn't that what Jesus said to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel?

[24 : 26] You must be born again. Born from above. Unless anyone is born again, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. Notice verses 14 and 15 here.

All this privilege and all this responsibility is likewise placed on the generations still to come. They also must enter into covenant with God.

No good just circumcising your children, says Moses. Or today, it's no good just baptizing them. Now, when we baptize our children, we're not putting some sort of lucky charm onto their life.

We're placing them in covenant with God. They grow up, as the Hebrews writer says, tasting the heavenly gift, the goodness of the word of life, the powers of the age to come.

That's the privilege of being born into the church of Jesus Christ and being raised in the nurture and the admonition of faith. But if they refuse themselves to submit to God's call, if they reject the call of God on their life personally, it is a very, very serious thing.

- [25 : 31] They're holding the Son of God himself up to contempt. And how much more now for us, says the apostle, is it a fearful thing, a deadly thing, to be in the hands of the living God?
- Don't ever fail to take this seriously. So you young ones, everybody here who's been brought up and the great privilege of knowing the nurture of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Don't let deafness stop you from obeying the truth. Verse 9 here and verse 12 are for you. Keep the words of this covenant gospel and do them so that you will enter into the blessings of God's everlasting covenant.
- And we all stand before the Lord today, every one of us, to hear his call and to respond, not to be deaf, not to be blind. One scholar tells us here that the list in verses 10 to 11 is the most inclusive list in the whole Old Testament.
- So there can be no presumption. None of us is exempt. And there can be no hiding either. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking we can deceive others and God.
- [26 : 51] We cannot deceive God, can we? God sees all of us from the greatest to the least, from the leaders to the youngest. And that leads, you see, to the second thing that Moses warns about in verses 16 to 28.
- And that is defiance, presuming upon the grace of God. Beware lest by that kind of presumptuous defiance on God's word, you deceive yourself into not truly doing the truth.
- We don't like hypocrites, do we? And the press loves to expose hypocrisy. Especially among those who have used their privilege, their position and exploited it.
- Goodness, think of all these ghastly sordid revelations that we're seeing today in the press about these powerful men using their position to sexually exploit young women and so on.
- Presuming themselves to be invincible because of their position. But Jesus is absolutely devastating about hypocrisy and especially religious hypocrisy.
- [28 : 00] if your eye is healthy, he says, do you remember? If you do see with true spiritual sight, then your whole body will be full of light.
- Your whole life will be full of the light of God. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light that is in you is darkness, that is, if you pretend to be people of the light but actually inside your heart is dark, how great is that darkness?
- That's what he, what happens, Jesus says, when you think you can serve two masters, God and the things of this world. But you can't do that, says Jesus.
- You're not loving God when you do that. You are hating him. And he knows it. And don't think you can hide from him because he knows our hearts.
- And that's what Moses is saying here. Do you see verse 16? He's saying, you know and you've seen how the Egyptians and these other pagans live. And it's a way, he says, that is detestable to God.
- [29 : 05] Do you see that? Powerful language. So don't be tempted to think and don't convince yourself that these ways are not that detestable and beware of trying to live with a foot in both of these camps.
- Don't think, verse 19, that you can bless yourself with the words of this covenant and pay lip service to the gospel and the people of God and think that that will actually save you if in fact you're walking in stubborn disobedience in your heart.
- Think again, he says. God sees and his anger, he says, will smoke against you in ferocious judgment. Don't be deceived.
- John Calvin says of these words, nothing is worse than to hope for peace whilst we wage war with God and to promise ourselves that he may let us alone when we provoke him by the impetuosity of our lusts.

We can't presume on God's grace. To enter into covenant with him, to profess faith and commitment to him is to be bound not just by the blessings of his promise but also by the responsibilities and the sanctions.

[30 : 20] And what God is saying to us here is speaking a lot of pious covenant Christian language isn't going to help you. Covenant circumcision or baptism won't save you.

It's your hearts you've got to circumcise, Moses keeps saying. Be no longer stubborn. The prophet Jeremiah is absolutely plain from God, isn't he, when God says, I will punish those who are circumcised merely in the flesh.

It's all a sham. Now says Paul, circumcision indeed the whole covenant gospel is a matter of the heart by the spirit. And the Bible tells us, doesn't it, repeatedly, God sees the heart and God will judge our hearts.

And that's Moses' warning here you see. And it's a deadly serious one, both for individuals and also for the whole church. First of all, notice the individual emphasis here.

And so many of these blessings and cursings, it's all been corporate, it's all been the people together, but here it's very striking, isn't it? Verse 19, the one, the one who walks in presumptuous defiance. Verse 20, the Lord will not be willing to forgive him.

[31 : 35] His anger will smoke against that man. Verse 21, he will blot out his name from under heaven. He will single him out.

It's intensely personal and intensely permanent. These words not forgiven in verse 20 don't occur anywhere else in the book, but it's the same phrase that you find in 2 Kings 24 of Manasseh, the king's unforgivable sin, so bad and so dark, that ultimately it led the whole people of Israel into exile.

The blotting out from under heaven that's the language we saw back in chapter 25, verse 19 about God saying he would blot out even the memory of Amalek, Israel's enemies, from under heaven forever and ever.

It's what God threatened to do back in chapter 9 after the golden calf to Israel and you remember Moses was so horrified, so shocked at the thought of such a terrible calamity that he went face down on the ground for 40 days and 40 nights pleading with God not to do such a terrible, terrible, irreversible thing.

Conversely, much more wonderfully, it's the language used in Isaiah 43, verse 25, of God promising to blot out sins and to remember them no more forever and ever, everlasting forgiveness.

[33 : 03] This is permanent language. And so this in these verses you see seems to signal far more than just a mere temporal punishment.

It's an everlasting punishment. This sin of defiant refusal of the Spirit of God. It's what Jesus himself speaks about in Matthew chapter 12.

And he says this will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come. And what Jesus is saying and what Moses is saying is that you can harden yourself presumptuously, deceitfully.

You can say, oh, I'll be safe, though I walk in the hardness of my heart. I'll be safe because I'm an evangelical Christian, not like those liberals.

I'll be safe because I'm a reformed Christian, not like those Pentecostals. I'll be safe because I'm a member of the Tron Church. I'll be safe because I lead a release the word group.

[34 : 13] I'll be safe because I'm an elder or I'm a pastor or whatever it is. And God says, it doesn't matter what you say, don't be deceived. Never presume upon your privilege.

But to whom much is given, much also will be required. Isn't that so? And that's why the New Testament writers constantly warn us and Jesus warns us so often against presumption and hypocrisy, paying lip service with a fur coat of religious piety that hides a heart life that is really more ragged and torn and soiled than old underwear.

Hebrews chapter 3, take care brothers, lest any one of you have an evil, unbelieving heart, leaving you to fall away from the living God.

Exhort one another today that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we share in Christ if we hold our confidence to the end. That's what you might call some really very practical Calvinism.

From the writer to the book of Hebrews. John Calvin says of our verse here in Deuteronomy, it's a much more grievous thing to be cut off from the elect people and to be set apart to evil as is said here, than to be deprived of our natural life.

[35 : 44] That's why we need these warnings, isn't it? And that's why we need to exhort and warn one another because it is an individual matter but not just an individual matter. Note also the very strong corporate emphasis here.

Verse 18, commands the whole congregation don't let a root like this grow up and poison and infect others and in the end infect everybody. That's what he's saying.

Bitter roots lead to bitter fruit. And in the end he says it can lead to the whole congregation, verse 19, being swept away moist and dry alike, old wood and new wood, the living and the dead.

The whole thing ruined. And friends, if you think this is just the Old Testament, read the New Testament. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 15, quotes this very verse and says, see to it that none of you in the church fails to obtain the grace of God.

And he says, so that no root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble and by it many, many are defiled. That's why there's so many of these corporate warnings in our Bibles.

[36 : 53] That's why we're told we are our brothers and our sisters keepers. Because we need one another. So the book of Hebrews, which is so full of those marvelous better promises that we have in these last days following Christ's resurrection, it is equally full, is it not, of more urgent and more solemn warnings not to presume upon God's grace.

read Hebrews chapter 6, read Hebrews chapter 10. Full of warnings of far worse judgment today than ever there were in Moses' day. If we should spurn the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified, he says, which is not the blood of bulls and goats, but the precious, infinitely precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why he says to the church that he's writing to there that you need to keep on warning and exhorting one another so that what verses 19 to 21 describe here does not happen to you in your church.

We need to consider how to encourage one another, stir one another up to love and good deeds so it doesn't happen to us. Don't give up meeting together as some people are doing.

That's the road to ruin, he says. We need to keep on encouraging one another, more, not less, as the coming of the Lord approaches.

[38 : 24] We need one another so we're not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, so that we do hold our faith firmly to the end, so that a brother or sister's hardening doesn't grow to defile many, to in the end destroy the church.

You see, the Bible teaches us so clearly you can't be a lone believer or this is what will happen to you. If you think that you're somehow different from that, you're deceiving yourself, friends, and you're in danger.

You're already starting down the road that verse 19 here is talking about, and that is a road to ruin. Trust God. That's why the Bible tells us as sinners we need to take the church seriously, and that's the message here.

We need one another. And of course, it's also telling us that the church must take sin seriously, because bitter roots grow up and become a danger to others and to all.

It will destroy the whole church in the end, if the church doesn't see to it that such attitudes are not left unchecked. Just look around at the church today in our nation, and you'll see churches that are being and already have been swept aside into utter irrelevance, into decay, into disaster.

[39 : 43] Why? Because defiant unbelief has been left unchecked and unchallenged by so many for so long. Isn't that right? And you see, just as verse 25 describes here, the whole populace seeing it and knowing why the church decline is taking place, that's exactly what we're seeing in our midst, in our nation today.

when leaders of churches, archbishops and moderators and people like that can't even give a straight question as to what the church believes. Dear, dear, dear, dear, you see, the world says to us, well, we scorn and we mock your God.

But it also says to us, we can see that you scorn and you mock your own God, and that's why you're falling apart. But God cares for the honor of his name.

God cares for his covenant gospel, sealed in the blood of his infinitely precious Son. And so when his own people, the people who take the name of Christ upon them and their churches, when they show the kind of contempt and utter disloyalty to him, disdaining the truth of his gospel, his anger is kindled.

These verses, 22 to 28, they're full, aren't they, of words for God's anger. Six different nouns are used to describe his anger, his wrath. Heated, great anger, verse 24.

[41 : 18] Anger and fury and great wrath, verse 28, and so on. God's anger and his hostility towards evil is constant.

And all the quality, the emotive quality of this language is here, as one writer tells us. Because it's meant to say that the triumph of God's mercy over his anger is no light thing.

It's the wonder of the gospel, the joy of his covenant, that God's mercy does triumph over wrath. Look at verse 23 here, where God is talking about overthrowing Israel, just like he did with Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities of Adman, Zoboim.

Look at that verse there and listen to me speak from the book of Hosea and Hosea's promise. When God says, how can I make you like Adman? How can I treat you like Zoboim?

My heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger. I will not destroy Ephraim for I am God and not man. And Hosea goes on like that as do all the prophets and they get their message from Moses himself in the very next chapter here.

[42 : 35] But they also stand resolutely with Moses in saying that there can never ever be presumption upon God's grace and forgiveness.

Hosea does promise God's mercy but he goes right on to say, so you, by the help of your God must return. Hold fast to his love and his justice.

Wait continually for your God. Return Israel and then, and then the Lord will heal your apostasy. See, God's warnings are always there to make us respond, to make us repent, to return to him.

Because he knows that only the penitent hearts can receive his grace and mercy and his great forgiveness. So never, ever let a spirit of presumption, of defiance, never let that deceive you into thinking that you can get away with not doing the truth of the gospel, not living the truth of the gospel, that all will be well.

Not so, says Moses, and not so says Jesus. And hence, you see, the last obstacle that we must avoid if we're to stand and not fall is there in this last verse, in verse 29.

[43 : 55] Distraction. Missing the whole point of God's revelation altogether. But where, says Moses, less distraction with the things in God's word or not in God's word should stop you doing the truth of God's word?

Derek Kibner says of this verse, it should be the remembered motto of every theologian and preacher and student of the word. Look at it. The secret things belong to the Lord, our God.

But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. You see how vital this verse is?

It's saying, recognize who God is, and by the way, it's not you. Don't think that you can be him. Don't think that you can know all the things God knows.

Don't think you can understand the infinite God and all his ways with your tiny, finite, feeble, creaturely brain. There's an infinity of things that you and I will never fathom because of who we are and what we are.

[45 : 06] The secret things belong to the Lord. We need to recognize that, friends. We need to be humble. We are not God. Is that a surprise to you? So we're not to treat the Bible as a source for our speculations.

It's not that. But it is the source of our salvation. So don't be distracted. Don't miss the point. Do what it says. That's what it's for.

That's why Peter says God has given us everything we need for life and godliness in these great and precious covenant promises in what we have in scripture. God's gospel is for hearing and obeying, not for speculation, not for us arrogantly pontificating about.

How often we get that wrong, don't we? We get bogged down in all kinds of ridiculous questions, all sorts of things. How can we resolve God's sovereignty and our responsibility?

How are we to take all these warnings so seriously in the New Testament? How can real believers ever fall away from God? So surely these warnings can't be written to real believers.

[46 : 21] But if they're real warnings, must then be written to people who are not real believers. But then how can you encourage people who are not real believers to encourage and endure in their faith today? And all these sorts of silly questions we get stuck into.

God says, no, no, no, forget all of that. All of these things you're reading, they're for you to listen to and to do so that you won't fall away in foolishness and faithlessness.

Don't be distracted. Don't be taken up with all the things that are beyond your understanding. Don't try and be God and know the secret things of God. And remember, just because you don't understand everything doesn't mean that everything is.

incomprehensible or illogical. It just means it's beyond you. There's all sorts of things you don't understand. It's the height of arrogance, isn't it, to say, well, I can't understand that, it can't be true.

Goodness me, I have many things in life I can't understand and yet they're absolutely plainly true. Can you understand thermodynamics and quantum mechanics and aeronautical engineering?

[47 : 28] I haven't got a clue. Some people can and they can put airplanes in the sky. And I know that they know enough for me to trust them to get me where I need to go. And just so, God reveals to us what we need to know to get us where we need to go.

He gives us in his covenant gospel all that will make us wise for salvation, to save us from his fierce anger and wrath, love. Through obedient faith in his word in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why he says to us again and again like verse nine here, keep the words of this covenant, do them, that's the point. Like verse twelve, enter in to the sworn covenant that God may be your God as he's promised.

Don't be distracted. trusted. That's what all this revelation is for. It's for obedience and faith and trust. Not to lead us into fruitless speculation.

It's to lead us into fruitful salvation. And friends, if that was so then in Moses' time, how much more so is it true for us who have so much more revelation of God's wonder and his grace and his saving mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ?

[48 : 51] And how much greater our response ability not to be distracted by so much fruitless, pointless speculation. But to listen to him, to trust him, to obey his word, to do the truth.

We're so easily distracted, we create all kinds of distractions. All sorts of problems that we say that we have with the Bible. Things that we think doesn't make sense, things we can't understand.

Sometimes it's just our ignorance. We need to study more and read more and think more. And we can understand. But sometimes it's just our arrogance. Unwillingness to accept that we are not God.

And that God has the right to know things that he doesn't reveal to us. And to believe that God says what we need to know, we can know. But God is clear.

His word is for doing. His revelation is for response. It's for our obedience. And if we're not doing that, friends, what it means is we are pitting ourselves against Almighty God.

[49 : 59] We're refusing to have him as our sovereign. And you see, always that is the reality, isn't it, behind the smoke screens of all our intellectual arguments about inconsistencies in the Bible, all the things we don't understand.

It's a smoke screen. When we're honest, the biggest problems in the Bible are not the things that we can't understand. They're the things that we understand absolutely plainly and we don't like and we don't want to do.

At least that's true for me. But God says finding the way of salvation lies in following the will and the word of the sovereign.

My gospel revelation is for your godly response. So don't be distracted. Don't miss its whole point. Listen to James.

Be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. And Paul, it's not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law will be justified.

[51 : 06] And John, whoever does the will of God will abide forever. And Jesus himself is just echoing Moses here when Moses says enter into this sworn covenant of life. Jesus says enter by the narrow gate.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them, does them, will be like a wise man who builds his house upon the rock. And when the wind and the waves and the storms of judgment come, it stands firm and does not fall.

In God's great, great mercy, friends, the things revealed the way of salvation belongs to us and to our children that we may do all the words of this law.

So don't be deaf. Don't let one another be defiant or distracted. All of this is for us and for our instruction because he loves us.

He doesn't want us to fall. He wants us to run so as to obtain. Don't let's overestimate ourselves.

[52 : 14] But don't underestimate the grace and the provision of God in these words that are for us. Let's pray. Oh, grant us grace, almighty Lord, to understand your holy word with meekness all its truth receive.

and by its light forever live. Help us, Lord, not to be deaf, never to be defiant, and never to be distracted from this, your word of life and its purpose for us, your people.

For Jesus' sake, amen.