

Original Sin And Holiness

Sin Is Extensive

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 19-Apr-11; Sermon #1042B

The last time I gave a sermon I tackled the "original sin" doctrine. The world blames God for creating what is called by the apostles in their epistles, "carnality," or what we might term as, "human nature." Now carnality is simply thinking, and therefore acting and living like every other human being does. However, it is God's purpose that we come to think and to act like Him and His Son Jesus Christ.

I began that sermon using the illustration of the many differences that occurred between the realities of some of the people and events that happened to the Von Trapp family as compared to what was shown in "The Sound of Music" film. I used that because the movie's many obvious lies and distortions are easily seen once one knows the truth. Now how did those distortions come to be? It is because of the thinking processes of the people who created the movie. In short, the lies and distortions were more important to them than the reality of the truth that the family really experienced.

That movie was a clear example of a lot of assisted self-serving ventures to make money. It illustrates the way human nature works in order to produce its desires. The reality is that the entire world consistently operates using the same lie-based self-centered theme. Once one understands this, it becomes no wonder that the worldly and cynical Pontius Pilate said to Jesus, "What is truth?" Pilate's purpose in asking that question was quite narrow. At the time and the place and the circumstance, he simply wanted to know the truth regarding the kingship of Jesus Christ.

I am looking at this in a broader way. I am implying that all of humanity, through the means of human nature, is operating on the basis of a foundation of lies, and that movie clearly illustrates that reality.

The world, through its doctrine of original sin, ultimately blames God for this self-centered and self-serving way of thinking and acting. Along the way to that conclusion, it also blames Adam and Eve for their "falling," and that they then passed this nature onto us through the childbirth process.

I am going to read to you Jeremiah 17:9. I know you know what it is says, but we are going to be reminded once again. We are talking about the heart of man.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful [full of lies] above all things, and desperately wicked. . . .

That is hard to understand. We are nice people, are we not? God does not lie though, and He says the human heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately wicked. Desperately wicked literally means that it is incurably sick. It cannot be repaired, so much so, that he adds this question.

Jeremiah 17:9 . . . Who can know it?

It is kind of open-ended there, but even those who are converted have a very difficult time recognizing how the nature that has been in there up until the time they have been converted was this way.

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

Let us start this sermon by asking: Are you not glad God is merciful? Are you not glad God is full of grace when our heart is like this, and somehow or another He finds it within Himself to have pity and to open salvation to you and me?

And so when we think about Jeremiah 17:9, is this what God created? That is what the world is saying. They are saying that God created this mind. So what does that suggest to you about God's character, to put that kind of a mind in you and me? Impossible. He did not do that. He did not put what we call "human nature" into Adam and Eve. Did God set all of mankind up for failure right from the get-go?

The picture in Scripture is clear. God gave Adam and Eve a spirit and He instructed them as to their responsibility by means of the Two Trees. Apparently He did this in direct face-to-face conversation with these two He just created. He did not force them to sin so that they had no choice.

We are going to see in the New Testament in Romans 1 that Paul leads off this great book regarding the doctrines of God. Notice what it says here.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

This gives the impression, does it not, that truth is available, but there are people in positions of authority, influence, or whatever you want to call it, who suppress the truth. It is like they possess some of it, but what they do have, they do not let it loose and give it to people.

Romans 1:19 Because what may be known of God is manifest in them [to them], for God has shown it to them.

It gives the impression that knowledge of God is available all the time. It has not been hidden.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Very telling. God is not saying here that His invisible attributes—all of them in every detail—are known to everybody at any time during the history of mankind, but He *is* saying that there is enough available to man through the natural things, like the creation, to know that there is a great God who is a Creator, and kind of opens the door then to a relationship with Him. But it is suppressed. It is held back. Whether leadership in positions of government or religion holds it back is not directly said. In fact I would take it that general knowledge of God is available to those who will face the realities of truth. Again, I am not saying it would lead to their conversion, but God holds all of mankind guilty, so that mankind is without excuse.

Romans 2:11-12 For there is no partiality with God. [He is talking now about the judgment of men.] For as many as have sinned without [apart] from law [not having a great deal of knowledge about the law] will also perish without [apart from the] law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.

Again, do not forget, there is no partiality with God. He judges everybody fairly, whether they grew up with the knowledge of the law, or whether they did not have it.

Romans 2:13-16 (For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature [How can that be—by nature? It is something given, innately, available to human beings.] do the things in the law, these, although not having the law [not written like Israel did at Mount Sinai], are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Even the Gentiles have the law written in their hearts, and it is interesting it says, "their conscience also bearing witness." *They know*, even though Christianity never got to them. There is enough there that God can convict them, or anyone, of breaking His law. The sum of these two series of verses in Romans 1 and 2 is that mankind does not have a leg to stand on, because God does not lie. So Jeremiah 17:9 states that according to God's evaluation, we have a heart so corrupt that it is beyond man's comprehension.

I showed in that sermon that God and Adam each played a part in the circumstances into which we were born, but God did not create this evil heart. Adam was merely the first to sin, and his sin began this world's immoral creation. The prophet Ezekiel and the apostle Paul make it clear that everybody is personally responsible for his own sins, and therefore death, so we cannot shift the blame to either God or Adam.

The Bible is very clear that there was no sin on earth among humanity until Satan showed up, and began sin's way through Adam and Eve. God permitted Satan's temptation to occur because His purpose demands that each person voluntarily choose the way he will go with his life.

The spirit God created and placed in Adam and Eve is described in Genesis 1:31 as "very good"—not deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who is telling the truth? God gave man a spirit that was very good. Man blames God for giving us human nature. Does that sound familiar to you, that somebody is making an accusation? Guess who the source of that accusation is, because he wants people to think that they are justified in their sins because God set them up. Satan is really sneaky, brethren. He is the source of that deceit.

Mankind became corrupted through that contact with Satan, and the continued contact with him when he became part of their environment, and all born from Adam and Eve also in turn submitted to Satan.

Since these are the Days of Unleavened Bread, and they are devoted to our responsibility to come out of sin, I want to first explore how bad sin is, and then at the end of the sermon to give at least an overview of the major question that remains for those who are converted: What can we do about it?

Turn to the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:12-14 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. [Paul is urging, "Move on in a certain direction," which is to] Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

Now there is major overall direction for us as to what we are to do with our life after God has called us—gotten us converted: We are to pursue holiness.

Do not be deceived into limiting sin to the few times that Paul mentioned within this context. Anybody who wants to understand or to attain to a good understanding of holiness must begin by coming to grips with the vast subject of sin. In its purest form, holiness is a state or a condition of being like God. We are not talking about degree here, but we are like God. We are like God because He has called us. We are like God because He has granted us repentance. We have been baptized. We have received His Spirit, and we are like Him to a limited extent, but we are not supposed to stop there. We keep on going, and this is where the analogy of Israel in the wilderness becomes really vital to our lives, because it is talking about what we do after we have passed through the water and been converted, and received His Spirit. We go on a pilgrimage, and that pilgrimage, in one sense, can be described as "walking or moving toward holiness."

Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable around views regarding human corruption, and I believe that the number of sins committed is usually vastly underrated, and the degree of human corruption is woefully underestimated.

Let us consider the Pharisees and the Sadducees of Jesus' day just for a moment. I think that you will agree with me that they thought of themselves as good people. It is even recorded that they thought of themselves as the very *cream* of righteousness of the Jewish society at that time.

The Pharisee in the parable is quoted as praying to God—"God, I thank you that I am not like other men—extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or this lowly tax collector over here." And yet, whenever Jesus spoke to them, He cut their evaluation of themselves into tiny pieces like He did in Matthew 23, where He really laid them out.

There is a proverb that gives a very apt description of the insatiable capacity of the human heart to sin. We are going to go there to pick up two verses in chapter 27. A very interesting picture is shown in this proverb.

Proverbs 27:19-20 As in water face reflects face, so a man's heart reveals the man. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

I am going to paraphrase here. "As a mirror reflects the image of the face that it beholds, so does the man's desire reflect the heart within; and the eye, the instrument of desire [What do the eyes do? They fasten on the things they want.] like the grave is never satisfied."

Man's desires are endless. That is what this is saying, and when we connect that then to Jeremiah 17: 9, those desires are, for the most part, not very good. It is a really rich picture that Solomon is giving us here in Proverbs.

Just for a moment let us go back in thought to the movie again. What did that movie do? It completely distorted one family's life. I dare say that there were at least a dozen outright lies and distortions—everything from the people's names to the circumstances they went through, and what they were doing in their life.

Where Agatha said when they left Austria—they walked across the street and got on a train—why, in the movie, did they have to come up with that dramatic thing about going through the convent, through the graveyard, and then escaping over the Alps, carrying their luggage in their hands? They altered the story into making it abound with images that the producers of the movie decided they could sell to the public to go along with the songs adding to the emotional impact of the story.

In that brief exposure in that one little movie—one out of ten thousand movies—man completely virtually failed to use the realities of the truth because they felt they could sell it better to the public, and they could make a profit and entertain people with lies. They probably did not really think of it that way. It is just the way that human nature works, and it is also why Solomon said that the eye, representing a man's desire, is never satisfied. He will do something with it in order to, in this case, make money.

Brethren, virtually the first thing that God does when He chooses a person that He wants to add to His Family as a new creation is to show that person that he is a guilty sinner. False ideas about sin lie at the base of many misunderstandings, and weak concepts exist regarding the dangerous nature of our heart's corruption. So let us better understand what sin is.

We know that sin is the transgression of the law, do we not? Yes. We also know it is to fall short. Yes. We know it is to miss the mark. Yes. It is to go off the path. Yes.

Now consider that these are all definitions of effects. I am saying to you this is what we see. Indeed the acts themselves are seen, but is it possible that the Bible shows there is actually more to sin than what we actually see? Yes, there is something there, because something produces and motivates missing the mark, going off the path, trespassing.

Sin is better understood as a vast contagious and forceful moral disease that affects the whole of the human race—every rank, class, name, nation, and language through the impulses that it motivates. Turn to Matthew 15. Sin is much more than what we see on the outside.

Matthew 15:15-20 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us." So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things, which proceed out of the mouth, come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

I want you to look at the first phrase in verse 19 again. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." I bet you thought sin began with an evil thought. Do you see that this verse is saying there was something there before the evil thought actually occurred? Evil thought is an effect of something else.

Jesus points to the heart as the disease's location within the person. The heart represents our innermost being—the *source* of our thought, and therefore our actions. Before one even does

anything by the mouth or by action taken by another part of the body, sin was already there. This disease—sin—is akin to spirit. You know what spirit is. It is a motivating influence. Now this disease—sin—is akin to spirit, which has the power to motivate the actions that appear on the outside.

This influential sinful nature we possess is a product of the mind of Satan inculcated through contact we have had with him, with his fellow demons, and the worldly systems he created.

Is not God's nature reflected in acts of love, joy, peace, kindness, and so forth, whereas Satan's mind reflects pride, envy, lust, bitterness, anger, hatred, and all of the thoughts and attitudes that are enmeshed within and generates and supports those works? That body of things generates the activity we see on the outside. In other words, sin is already in the heart without any overt visible act. It is already there, whatever this disease is.

Let us go to Romans 7.

Romans 7:11-18 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, [that we might be able to see it] was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful [able to be seen]. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Romans 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Notice two things here. The converted Paul—an apostle for about twenty years by this time when he wrote this epistle, and one who apparently spent about three and one-half years being taught by Christ—admits in verse 14 to his carnality. "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal." It did not dominate him, but it was present as an influence. An influence is a spirit. There is nothing there. It is just a spirit that is there, influencing him to go in the wrong direction.

In verse 17 he says that sin still dwelt in him to such an extent it still empowered him and motivated him to act. In Paul's case, it was not the act—going off the path or whatever—that was the sin, he is referring to what *motivated* him to do those things that is sin.

In verse 21 he refers to sin as an evil present with him. Again, it was not the act. It was an evil presence with him. In verse 23 he refers to sin as a law, indicating an active force. Think of the law of gravity, brethren. You do not see it, but it is there, and it is working constantly, pulling us toward the earth. These are the comparisons Paul is making with what sin is, that it is an influencing force that is within, motivating what we see on the outside.

Do you get that? He is differentiating between what he does and what *motivates* him to do what he does, and sin—the one that is motivating—is the one we have the trouble with. So even a man who was an apostle and as close to Christ that you can get, was admitting, here, that sin—that which motivates what we see on the outside—was still within him, motivating him to sin from time to time.

But please understand that Paul was not saying that this dominated him. It is there, just like gravity is there, and it is influencing at all times.

Let me define this in a more expanded way. *Sin consists of thinking, saying, doing, or imagining anything that is not in conformity with the mind and will of God.* It is the outward and inward departure of exact absolute mathematical agreement with God's revealed will and character, and to do these things then—that is, following its impulses—constitutes sin in God's sight.

Brethren, you and I are *never* going to overcome this. Salvation is God's gift, and that salvation is going to go to those people who are striving tooth and toenail to have their relationship with God as tight, as close, as one, as loving, as humble as it can possibly be, and then on the outside we deal with the effects of sin that dwells within to the best of our ability. We will *never* save ourselves, and if we really value the salvation that God wants to give us, we are going to humble ourselves before Him. That is the course of action that God is looking for, and that is what He will respond to, and clean us up to the degree we will allow Him.

It is very clear from Scripture that there are sins of omission as well as commission. Turn with me to Matthew 25 for another parable.

Matthew 25:40-46 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these [meaning His brethren], you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

What was the sin there? It was what they *failed* to do. It was not what they did. It was what they *failed* to do. So they did nothing, and it was sin. The sin within them motivated them to do nothing. And what happens to them? They are cursed. That is rather sobering.

Then there are those who may commit a sin, and be ignorant of doing so, and thus believe themselves free of guilt.

We are going to go to Numbers 15. Also, the entire chapter of Leviticus 24 talks about this sin, but we are just going to look at Numbers 15 here because it does it in very short order.

Numbers 15:25-29 So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; [They did not

mean to do it, but somehow or another, they did it. They did not know they did not do the right thing, but God said it was still sin.] they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their unintended sin. It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people did it unintentionally. 'And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

Let us put a New Testament light on this. Go to Luke 12.

Luke 12:48 "But he who did not know [that is, know his master's will], yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

Luke 12:47 "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

It is interesting that the servant was not excused on account of his ignorance, but he nonetheless was punished for it, although the punishment fell short of the Lake of Fire.

As this portion of the sermon closes, the reality of the presence of sin in our life and its effect cannot be overestimated. Sin is an ever-present influence, and one must be very careful to keep close to God. Let us be thankful that God hedges us in, protecting us from the very worst of it.

Now what can be done about it? Let us go to Ezekiel 36. This statement takes place in the midst of a prophecy of the time that is just ahead of us when God is rescuing Israel from the tribulation that is ongoing.

Ezekiel 36:25-28 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

Let us connect this with Ezekiel 18. This is in the same kind of context.

Ezekiel 18:30-31 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions, which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

These two verses describe an overall principle of how the conversion process begins. First of all God must first act in our behalf because we are so enthralled with Satan we would otherwise never break through, and so He must give us a new heart, a new way of thinking. Remember, the old heart, the deceitful heart, cannot be repaired. And, you cannot slice it out and replace it with something else. God has to do that. He gives us a new heart. But Ezekiel 18:30-31 has to be joined to that because it is also part of this overall principle, and that is that we must respond favorably to God's initial effort to change us. That is why it says we have to *get* a new heart. God will give, but we have to reach out, as it were, and respond to Him, or it will not be given. We must respond favorably to what God initiates, and get that new heart.

These two factors are major reasons for what is implied in James 4:

James 4:6 But He gives more grace.

God gives the calling. God makes it possible for us to respond. Paul says God grants us repentance. He gives us that gift, and so salvation is completely and totally in God's graceful effort on our behalf, but we must respond.

He leads us to repentance, and then makes us an offer of a covenant. Upon entering into that covenant we are confronted then with a major biblical principle about what we are to do with the rest of our life following being given grace, to have the bondage to Satan broken.

This instruction given the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30 is essential. I am sure that those of you within the sound of my voice are doing everything in your power to try to respond to God, because this is our responsibility after God gives us the new heart and grants us repentance. We *must* respond.

Deuteronomy 30 was given to the Israelites literally days before they went into the Promised Land. There is a great deal of instruction here.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 "For this commandment 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, '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?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. ["May" indicating permission to do.]"

In this brief preamble God reminds us of something that is exceedingly important. I am going to put this into my words. He is saying, "You are going to find My way difficult at times, but it is not beyond your ability if you will use your faith."

Again, using my own words, He was saying, "The first thing I have done is to equip you with sufficient knowledge, understanding, and power, that when combined with My help you can accomplish the course that I have set before you."

God is saying, "I have done everything to make the observance of My commands possible."

He is saying, "My laws are not impossibly idealistic. They are not impractical. They are not unachievable. It does not require an Einstein to understand them, and it doesn't require one with the strength of Hercules to keep them."

He is saying that they are doable by ordinary people that He has empowered. It is He that makes the difference. He not only calls, He not only gives us His Spirit and grants us repentance, He empowers us with the very ability that we need to be able to keep His laws by giving us understanding, the motivation to do it, and encouragement or whatever is needed, but *always*, brethren, we have to use our faith.

If you believe it cannot be done, you are already licked. It *can* be done. He said, "*I will always make a way of escape.*" He will get that which seems undoable out of the way if we will go with Him. The reason He is being so, I guess you might say, stubborn on this is that He is designing whatever it is we need to be prepared for His Kingdom, and we need what we are going through in order to be prepared. Undoubtedly it might be able to be done another way, but that is what He has chosen right at this time.

When Jesus asked His Father in John 17:17 to sanctify us by His truth—His Word is truth—we are already sanctified, and we are made holy by Him, and submission to God's truth. That truth is already in our mind.

Let us proceed on. This is *very* serious. As we begin the last part of this paragraph, I want you to think about the seriousness. This is a life-and-death matter. That is pretty serious. In the first three or four verses of that preamble, He has removed our excuses. "I haven't done anything too hard," He said. "It is right there. Do it. I am going to be watching over you, and I am going to make sure those trials are not too hard. I am going to make sure that is what you need at this time."

Let me add this to it: What we are in the body He is creating, because He has called us to fulfill a responsibility.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish [it is a life and death matter]; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Again back to verse 15 and we will look at various parts of it as we continue through it. It might be helpful to recall that the previous generation of the Israelites of the Exodus had the land set before them, and they refused it. That was in the second year after coming out. They refused to go in. Said it was too big of a job. God made sure from that point that their choice was made, and what did He do

with them? He allowed them to die. There was a life and death matter, and He did that as a witness to you and me to not to do that. They turned their back on their faith, and did not trust either God or His servant Moses.

The generation being spoken to here at the end of the book of Deuteronomy also had the land before them, and they still had the opportunity to choose life in the land. The circumstances had changed just a bit. In the sense of looking at these two groups, we are more like the first generation than the second generation because the land is still before us, and we have not completed our pilgrimage.

I believe that these verses here, verses 15 through 20 especially, might be titled, "The Summary of the Entire Book of Deuteronomy," or it might also be titled as, "A Summary of Our Responsibilities Upon Entering into The Covenant With God." It depends from which angle we look at it.

All the points that are expressed here in this paragraph have been expressed elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy, but putting them all together in one place makes them a lot more intense.

We have to be careful that we do not allow ourselves to slip into the thought of the world with their "once saved, always saved" doctrine, because that doctrine is devastating to people's growth. They invariably just almost quit. They will just do enough barely to get by.

What He is doing here in verses 16 through 20 is drawing our attention to our personal choices throughout our pilgrimage that began at baptism, and He especially draws attention to the land in verse 16. He mentions the land again in verse 18, and again He mentions it in verse 20. The Promised Land is a type of the Kingdom of God.

What is He saying to you and me? *"Don't let your eye slip from the goal. Perhaps above all things, always live for the future while you are in the present, but the future is always there, and do not forget it. Use your faith, because what lies ahead is so great, it is so awesome, you do not want to let it slip away."*

Remember, earlier He admits that it is going to be difficult from time to time, but what lies ahead is so good, so wonderful, so awesome that you cannot ever let the goal get out of your mind. So, our growth and being prepared for entering into and possessing the land (as we advance through this paragraph) hinges on our choices. In a way, that is the conclusion. It hinges on our choices. It does not mean that every choice is going to be made correctly, perfectly under every circumstance, but He is willing to forgive as long as we keep on going. We repent, and pick ourselves up, and we go on.

Listen to this string of things in verse 20. Verse 20 says, "that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may *cling* to Him." Does that not indicate a really close relationship? You are hanging on for dear life! Why? **"For He is your life."** It is that important.

What He is ultimately coming to in this paragraph here is our eternal life. Our growth, our overcoming depends on the quality of the relationship that we have with Him. "For He is your life, and the length of your days [eternal life]; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD SWORE to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

To the issue here to successfully negotiating the pilgrimage we are on, Jesus gave the answer very succinctly in John 17:3. Eternal life is to know God, to be intimate with Him, almost like a marriage relationship. That is why He said to cling to Him. Do not let go. Always keep Him in sight. Love

Him. Obey Him. Cling to Him. This is a package God is offering if we will submit by making right choices.

Now we are going to turn from here to another very familiar scripture or two in the book of Galatians. We do this because this is one of the chapters that discourages us from time to time.

Galatians 5:13-17 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

That is a very succinct summary of Romans 7 in those last two verses. We have to understand that though God provides us with a new heart and a new spirit, and that we have to give ourselves over to Him, even though there is a new purpose and a new life and energy to accomplish that purpose, the residue of the Satan-damaged heart remains to exert its influence on one's life. In between these two sections of scripture—Galatians 5:13-17, and Romans 7—Paul is not saying that it cannot be overcome. It can! That Satan-influenced heart will never be completely subdued, but it can be dominated by a person who is walking in the Spirit and using his life and time to be really close to God.

Paul admits in Romans 7 that it is a very difficult inward struggle, but he also implies in that same chapter that it will be around, exerting its influence until we are changed and in the Kingdom of God. But one must not be dismayed at the fact of this internal spiritual war. It is actually evidence, brethren, that we are converted. How about that apple! If that warfare were not there, we would just roll over to carnality's persuasion and willingly follow the Satan-engrained habit.

There is no such thing as sinless perfection. God expects that we are going to sin. He does not *want* us to commit sin, but we will. But if we are keeping close to Him, we will go to Him, seeking forgiveness, and He will forgive, and we will go on.

There is an interesting verse, and one of the more interesting things about this verse is where it appears. It is in the Song of Solomon.

Song of Solomon 6:13 Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you! What would you see in the Shulamite? As it were, the dance of the double camp.

Strange, is it not, "The dance of the double camp"?

In the KJV it says, "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you!" And what will you see in the Shulamite? "As it were, the company of two armies."

The Shulamite is a type of the church, and in this lovely woman there is the company of two armies. Guess what those two armies are. With God's Spirit there, there is also human nature and the damage Satan has done.

In this brief word-picture it indicates the kind of tension that exists just before a battle erupts between armies poised to strike, and all within a single person as within the Shulamite. If it is used for a person in a tension-filled position, it pictures one who is on edge. There are certain measures of anxiety, uncertainty, and even timidity, and the person in the middle is being pulled one way, and then the other. That is what happens when God gives us *His* Spirit.

When God gives us a new heart we have to expect that there is going to be a battle royale going on inside of us. We are going to be just like the Shulamite. We are going to do the dance of the double camp. But brethren, that choice is important, and God wants to know—He wants to see which way we are going to set our will to go. Are we going to go with the invader, or are we going to choose to be on God's side by faith, and go with Him?

That is what He wants. He leaves that choice to us. He is with us. He promises He will never give us too much, but the battle is on, and He wants to see what kind of choices we are going to make, which side are we going to come down on.

Are we going to trust Him by faith, or are we going to collapse and give in to human nature? So the battle is on. Let us fight it the right way.