

Reversionism

The Eight Stages of Reversionism (or, backsliding)

Ephesians 4:17-19

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer (1)live as the Gentiles do, (2)in the futility of their thinking. They are (3)darkened in their understanding and (6)separated from the life of God <because of (5)the ignorance that is in them <due to (4)the hardening of their hearts. (7)Having lost all sensitivity, (8)they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”

(1) Reaction/Distracted Stage (“*..live as the Gentiles do..*”)

- Gentiles unbelievers cannot focus on God during good or bad times.
- The carnal believer faces impact in their life from circumstances that surface as a distraction (good or bad).
- Impact- When something happens in life that causes you to spiritually flinch or look away from God. Like a bird hitting the windshield of a car, circumstances hit your view of God
- Reaction- When you respond like a Gentile during circumstances and look away from the windshield.
- Distracted- While you look away your focus is placed on something else. At this point you continue because you are either ignorant of doctrine or arrogant towards doctrine.

(2) Frantic Search for Happiness (“*..in the futility of their thinking..*”)

“Futility” is the Greek word ματαιοτητι or “*mataiotati*” is the word for emptiness, futility, worthlessness. New Testament uses it to refer to:

- Presumption of human thought
- Pagan Idolatry
- A deceitful way of life

The idea of emptiness in their thinking gives the impression of a vacuum in their soul that will implode and suck in the first thing they see after the impact of life in stage one.

This stage is very deceitful because everything seems peaceful and happy. All ideas and actions are quickly justified and engaged in.

It is a period of great freedom and unhindered burdens, similar to the experience of a person falling through the air after leaving the top of a ten story building. At least, a great sense of freedom and control for the first nine floors down. Hitting the ground is the beginning of stage three

(3) Boomerang Stage (“*..darkened in their understanding..*”) Frustration results from decisions made during stage two.

Adversity will increase forcing you to make a decision to return or continue into stage four.

This is the most common place for a believer to try to recover. But, they must have been taught how to recover and how to maintain or else they will never return to God’s perfect plan.

Attitudes of people in Boomerang Stage:

1. They want to try one more attempt at happiness without returning to God

2. They want to solve the problem without God due to their guilt.
3. They become angry at God and enter a more conscious rebellion.

(Stages 4, 5, 6 overlap but connect like a chain.)

(4) Black Out of the Heart (*“ . . .the hardening of their hearts. . .”*)

The heart, or soul, is distorted, disengaged, or blacked out by the old sin nature.

When the heart is dysfunctional the emotions are left unrestrained and in control. This leads quickly into stage five, Emotional Revolt

(5) Emotional Revolt of the Soul (*“ . . .the ignorance that is in them. . .”*)

Emotional revolt creates psychotic behavior

Emotions swing believer back and forth

Personality is fractured and the believer swings through a wide range of personalities during a daily routine: happy, cheerful, apathy, self pity, crabby, miserable. Romans 7:24, “wretched man” is a psychological term

(6) Divine Detachment (*“ . . .separated from the life of God. . .”*)

Failure to recover during stage five causes God to hand them over to themselves, their old sin nature.

Review:

- Believer in Fellowship. Controlled by Holy Spirit
- Believer in Stages 1 & 2. Controlled by Self
- Believer in Stages 3-5. Out of Control
- Believer in Stages 6-8. Controlled by a very distorted self

Example of Divine Detachment is Romans 1:24

Confession becomes a thing of the past

Life here is lived in Satan’s Domain

False doctrine replaces truth

Norms and standards fall

Light in soul becomes darkness; answers can not be seen Result is scar tissue on the soul or a callused conscience.

(7) Scar Tissue on the Soul (*“ . . .Having lost all sensitivity. . .”*)

Just like scar tissue builds up on wounds and makes the skin ugly to the sight & insensitive to the touch, so the soul becomes ugly during human fellowship and insensitive to the Holy Spirit

The believer begins to hurt those around them and cannot fulfill Eph. 4:32, “Be kind & compassionate one to another.”

With no sensitivity for right and wrong a whole new world opens up to them. They can allow themselves to do things they could not do before.

(8) Self Detachment (*“ . . .they have given themselves over to sensuality. . .”*)

God detaches them at stage six. Here they detach themselves to their old sin nature

They live in greediness with no satisfaction

They become out cast

They rebel against everything listed below:

- Mankind-they use people
- Natural order

- Privacy
- Property
- Sexual boundaries
- Norms and standards
- The Lord Jesus Christ

This is the end of the line for them,

“They are brute beast, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught (put on exhibit as a source of testing to believers) and destroyed (die the sin unto death).” - 2 Peter 2:12

One of two things happens with them:

1. They die the sin unto death (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 John 5:16)
2. Live on earth as a source of testing for other believers, very similar to Satan’s purpose

IMPORTANT NOTE: *If a person still has a desire to return to God they have not reached stage eight. They are at an earlier stage that does have a way out. Please see “Spiritual Recovery” from James 4:6-10.*

Ephesians 4:17-19 -

"I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer **live** as the **Gentiles** do, in the **futility** of their **thinking**. ¹⁸**They are darkened** in their **understanding** and **separated** from the life of God because of the **ignorance** that is **in them** due to the **hardening** of their **hearts**. ¹⁹**Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality** so as to **indulge** in every kind of **impurity**, with a **continual lust for more**."

(L&EK GNT = Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament)

live - περιπατειν (to walk)- L&EK GN - to walk about, to conduct one's life, points to a habitual action.

Gentiles - εθνη (nations)- L&EK GNT- people, Gentiles, heathen, those who were not Jews.

The Jews considered Gentiles as basically immoral. Gentiles accepted premarital sex, homosexuality, idolatry. But these things were considered wrong and should be abstained from as a Jew.

futility ματαιοτητι (vanity)- L&EK GNT -vanity, emptiness. Contains the idea of aimlessness, leading to no object or end

thinking νοος (mind)- L&EK GNT - mind, thinking facility, reasoning capacity. Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:3

They are darkened εσκοτωμενοι (having been darkened)- L&EK GNT - to darken. The perfect participle is used in a periphrastic construction indicating the continuing darkened condition.

understanding διανοια (intellect)- L&EK GNT - thinking through, understanding, intelligence, the mind as the organ of thinking

separated απηλλοτριωμενοι (having been alienated)- L&EK GNT - to estrange, to alienate. The perfect tense emphasizes the continuing state of existence; being alienated from the life of God. It does not imply that they had at one time enjoyed that life; it means simply being aliens from it.

ignorance αγνοιαν (ignorance)- L&EK GNT - ignorance, lack of knowledge. It refers to the inability to comprehend and see the light.

in them ουσαν εν αυτοις (being in them)-

hardening πωρωσιν (hardness)- When free will and a persons thinking become insensitive to God.

"Hardening" of the heart is a progressive state which hardens the conscience to respond to God. This person actually opposes God. Pharaoh's hardened his heart (Ex. 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:35) then God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex.4:21; 7:3; 14:4). See Psalm 95:8 as in Exodus 15:22 and Hebrews 3:7

hearts καρδιας (heart)-

Having lost all sensitivity απηληγηκοτες (having ceased to care)- L&EK GNT- to cease to feel pain or grief, to become callous, insensible to pain. The translation 'past feeling' expresses the sense accurately. The lack of moral feeling and discernment means the inability to exercise any restraint. "This is a classical term which means primarily that one's skin has become callous and no longer feels pain" (F.F. Bruce) In classical usage it means "put away sorrow" and to "be despondent". Used around 200 BC to mean "ceasing to feel pain."

they have given themselves over εαυτους παρεδωκαν (themselves gave up)- L&EK

GNT - to deliver over to, to hand over to.

These people are clearly blamed for their own condition.

Their impurity and debauchery first hardens them and then in Romans 1:24-28 it destroys them.

sensuality ασελγεια (to lewdness)- L&EK GNT - unrestrained living.

This means "debauchery" and is one of the "works of the flesh" in Gal. 5:19. The idea here is to throw off all restraint and flaunt itself fearless of judgment or shame, disregarding the rights or feelings of others or public decency. Colossians 3:5 says to put this off.

indulge εργασιαν (work)- L&EK GNT - working, producing, performance, practice

impurity ακαθαρσιας (uncleanness)- L&EK GNT - uncleanness, filthiness, impurity

continual lust for more πλεονεξια (greediness)- L&EK GNT - insatiable craving greed, consuming ambition, giving rein to appetites and desires which are against the laws of God and man.

This word is "covetousness". It is the climax of Ephesians 5:5 as well as the climax here.

This may be considered a third of three vices mentioned: Debauchery, Impurity and Covetousness, or in the NIV Sensuality, Impurity and Lust.

Lev. 18:3, 24-30; 20:23-24

Spiritual Recovery

James 4:4-10:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James 4:6-10 – Breakdown into Steps

1. Submit yourselves therefore to God.
 2. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
 3. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
 4. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and
 5. Purify your hearts, you double-minded.
 6. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, your joy to gloom.
 7. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
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1. Spiritual Submission to God

- a. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then to God.” - James 4:6,7
- b. The word “submit” here means to “take your rightful place in rank”
- c. This is a total and unconditional release of any claim to your life. It is counting yourself dead.

2. We can now resist the devil.

- a. This resistance is now empowered by faith while filled with the Spirit
- b. We must lay aside entangling sins.
 - i. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” – Hebrews 12:1
- c. We must come to our senses.
 - i. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’” - Luke 15:17
- d. We must escape the snare of the devil that captivates us
 - i. “...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” -2 Timothy 2:25, 26

3. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

- a. We now can begin the journey home and draw near to God who is awaiting our return. He will meet and welcome us. (Luke 15:11-32)
 - i. “his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’” – Luke 15:20-22
- b. Begin to apply 2 Peter 1:5-7 –
 - i. “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

4. Cleanse your hands, you sinners

- a. Recovery demands correction of habits and actions

5. Purify your hearts, you double-minded

- a. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9
- b. “purify” is “to wash.” This requires confession of deeds done.

- c. Our actions are washed in applying the word (Ephesians 5:26)
 - i. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” – Ephesians 5:25-27
- d. There must also be the purification of double minded attitudes.
 - i. This “double-mindedness” (James 1:8) is a wavering between God’s will and our own will.
 - ii. “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” – James 1:7-8
- e. God’s will must take precedence over our will.
 - i. Matt. 26:39 – “going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”
 - ii. James 4:13-15 – “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”
 - iii. Isaiah 14:12-15 describes Satan’s fall, Satan’s attitude, and the spirit of this age:
 - 1. ““How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
13 You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;[a]
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’
15 ***But you are brought down to Sheol,***
to the far reaches of the pit.
- f. For revival this decision must take place as Elijah challenged his generation in 1 Kings 18:21.
 - i. “Elijah came near to all the people and said, ‘How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ And the people did not answer him a word.”

6. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom

- a. Only by true repentance will one endure the long journey home.
- b. The path of spiritual recovery is often painful.
- c. We must face all the bad decisions made in departing from the will of God.
 - i. Zacchaeus: “Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” – Luke 19:8
- d. What provided “laughter” on the way down is a source of “mourning” in true repentance.
 - i. Matt.5:4,8 – “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
 - ii. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

7. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up

- a. The “before the Lord” is the “presence of the Lord.” This signifies two things:
 - i. The completion of recovery has occurred.
 - ii. You are once again positioned to fulfill God’s perfect plan for your life.
- b. Jonah fled from “the presence of the Lord.” (Jonah 1:3)
 - i. Which means Jonah fled from God’s plan for his life as far as location, function and attitude.
- c. Once you are back you are again fully equipped to serve effectively just as the prodigal son was fully equipped upon his return.
 - i. “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. - Luke 15:21-24
- d. Romans 11:29, “For God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”
- e. Even your gifts and your calling are never taken away even in your sin.
- f. Recovery is necessary for your gifts and calling to be used to fulfill God’s plan for your life.

Considering Self a “Christian” but Denying the Lord and Truth

2 Peter 2:1-3 – “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

Purpose of Salvation is Deliverance from Sin Positionally (spirit) and Practically (soul, body)

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 – “Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”

- John 5:14 – “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’
- Psalm 119:11 – “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23 – “Now may the God of peace himself **sanctify you completely**, and may your whole spirit and soul and body **be kept blameless** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 1 John 3:7-9 – “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ”