

# DOCTRINE OF REVERSIONISM

## I. Introduction.

- A. This doctrine deals with the most serious situation that can befall a believer after he makes the salvation adjustment and possibly achieves some degree of spiritual success and growth.
- B. This doctrine addresses the questions that arise with respect to those who do not continue their Ph<sub>2</sub> advance in Bible doctrine; the doctrine of reversionism (commonly known as back-sliding in many fundamentalist circles) addresses this issue.
- C. This doctrine also addresses some of the separate but related issues of volition, eternal security in salvation, personal sinning, basic carnality, and spiritual recovery.
- D. The very serious nature of reversionism is seen in the strongly worded epistle to the Hebrews, which provides significant warnings to those believers who were in danger of entering religious reversionism. Heb. 5:11-12, 6:4-8, 10:23-31,35-38, 12:12-17,25
- E. This doctrine also is the basis for the refutation of the false doctrine regarding the perseverance of the saints; this false doctrine is found in a number of forms and with some variations.
  1. The classical form of the doctrine is found in the teachings of Calvinism, which insist that God has irresistibly drawn the elect to put their faith in Him for salvation, so they must necessarily persevere as Christians and in the end be saved.<sup>1</sup>
  2. Traditional Calvinists also believe that all who are born again and justified before God necessarily and inexorably proceed to sanctification; failure to proceed to sanctification in their view is evidence that the person in question was not truly saved in the first place.
  3. Proponents of this doctrine distinguish between an action and the consequences of an action; they suggest that after God has regenerated someone, the person's will cannot reverse its course.
  4. They further argue that God has changed that person in ways that are outside of his or her own ability to alter fundamentally, and he or she will therefore persevere in the faith.
  5. Essentially, they teach that once God saves someone, he is no longer able to exercise his volition and reject God's grace and plan in time.
  6. Many fundamentalists are quite double minded with respect to this issue; they often promote the reality of eternal security, but undermine it in various ways.<sup>2</sup>
    - a. The first is to say that all believers are saved forever; however, they go on to say that if they do not persevere, we cannot be sure they were "truly saved".
    - b. They state, *"This does not mean that every one who professes faith in Christ and who is accepted as a believer in the fellowship of the saints is secure for eternity and may entertain the assurance of eternal salvation."*
  7. The real concern and confusion for many fundamentalists is expressed by John MacArthur, who advocates eternal security, but says, *"The teaching of "once saved, always saved" may carry the false implication that after "accepting Christ" a person may live any kind of life and still be saved."*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseverance\\_of\\_the\\_saints](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseverance_of_the_saints)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/J93-41-1.htm>

- F. These false teachings do nothing to address the reality that believers continue to possess an active sin nature after salvation, want to sin, do sin after salvation, and often retrograde to an inferior spiritual status.
- G. Both the Old and New Testaments provide evidence of this phenomenon, as will be documented in this doctrine.

## II. Vocabulary.

- A. There is no specific or technical term for reversionism in either the Old Testament or New Testament.
- B. However various terms and phrases are used to communicate the reality that believers can and do regress spiritually
- C. Such terms and phrases include:
  1. Turned aside. Job 23:11, 34:27; Mal. 2:8, 3:7; ITim. 1:6, 5:15
  2. Turned away/turned the heart away. IKings 11:4,9; IICChron. 25:27; Isa. 1:4; Jer. 8:5
  3. Turned back. ISam. 15:11; Ps. 44:18, 78:57; Jer. 11:10; Zeph. 1:6; Acts 7:39
  4. Abandoned. IICChron. 24:18; Isa. 1:4
  5. Departed. Job 23:12; Ps. 18:21; Jer. 5:23
  6. Forsake the Lord. Josh. 24:16,20; Isa. 1:28; Jer. 2:19
  7. Fall away. Ps. 101:3; Mk. 4:17; ITim. 4:1; Rev. 2:5
  8. Leaving your first love. Rev. 2:4
  9. Fallen from grace. Gal. 5:4
  10. Enemies of the cross. Phil. 3:18
  11. Wandered away. ITim. 6:10
  12. Comes short of grace. Heb. 12:15
  13. Withdraw/shrink back. Heb. 10:38
  14. Unstable souls. IIPet. 2:14, 3:16
  15. Lukewarm. Rev. 3:16

## III. Definition and description.

- A. Reversionism is simply defined by Webster as a return to a former state.
- B. By definition, an unbeliever cannot be a reversionist, since he has never advanced beyond the initial state into which he was born.
  1. All unbelievers are born captive to the sin nature. Rom. 6:17
  2. As such, they reside in a state of spiritual death, dominated by their trespasses and sins. Eph. 2:1
  3. They live their lives according to the cosmic principles that dominate this world, which is ruled by Satan. Eph. 2:2
  4. As such, they consistently indulge the sin nature (they are incapable of doing anything else), and reside under God's wrath. Eph. 2:3; Jn. 3:36
  5. Therefore, all unbelievers are born spiritually dead, are controlled by their sin nature, and reject the doctrine of the gospel; apart from faith in Christ, that situation never changes.
- C. By definition, believers are the only ones that can revert to the former state; however this regression does not affect the reality of Ph<sub>1</sub> salvation.

1. This does not imply or teach a loss of salvation, which is a spiritual impossibility. Jn. 10:27-29; Eph. 2:8 **For by grace** (God's undeserved and unmerited favor) **you have been saved** (periphrastic construction, using the to be verb and the perfect passive participle, which literally reads *you are currently saved, having been saved in the past, with the present result that you are still saved*) **through faith**; (διὰ with the genitive, which is used to denote the agency that produced the state of salvation) **and this not of yourselves** (lit. the neuter singular of the demonstrative pronoun, which cannot grammatically refer to grace or faith, but only to the state of salvation—lit. *this state of salvation is not from the source of you*) **it is the gift of God.** cf. Eph. 1:4; Rev. 17:8
  2. It does teach that the believer is no longer advancing spiritually; in spite of any and all protestations to the opposite, the believer is, in reality, in a state of spiritual retrogression.
  3. While reversionism does not affect the salvation of any believer, it does stop his spiritual growth in time, and adversely impacts the potential for blessings and rewards in time and eternity.
- D. Reversionism entails the rejection of some portion of the Word of God, which the believer must then rationalize as being acceptable. IJn. 1:6
1. Rejection of major doctrines such as the necessity of the local church, attendance in Bible class, authority, or separation place the believer in immediate spiritual jeopardy. Heb. 10:25
  2. One cannot reasonably claim to be growing spiritually and reject the institution, the office, and the environment that God Himself established for spiritual growth in the Church Age. Eph. 4:11ff; ITim. 3:15
  3. However, rejection of any doctrine, which is not acknowledged and confessed, leaves the believer in a state of carnality. IJn. 1:10
  4. If this state of carnality is not acknowledged and addressed, the believer will begin the descent into reversionism.
  5. The danger in rejecting one portion of the Word of God is that the theological grid is interconnected; individual doctrines cannot effectively be isolated from the body of the faith.
  6. Therefore a reversionist is a believer who has been exposed to the truth at some level, and has rejected and departed from the truth. ITim. 4:1
- E. Reversionism involves perpetuating the state of carnality (being out of fellowship), and not addressing that sin with the rebound technique.
1. One must make a distinction between incidental sinning and perpetuated carnality, since even the greatest of believers continues to commit personal sins however, not all believers become reversionists. IJn. 1:10; Heb. 10:39
  2. All believers possess the indwelling sin nature (STA), which makes sinless perfection in this life an impossibility. IJn. 1:8,10
  3. When a believer sins, he immediately dies temporally (gets out of fellowship), and forfeits his fellowship with God. Rom. 6:16,23
  4. The **only method** by which he can be restored to fellowship with God is the rebound technique. IJn. 1:9
  5. Failure to confess sins (because of rationalization, guilt, ignorance, unforgiveness, or any other reason) leaves the believer in a state of perpetuated carnality.

6. An adequate lack of knowledge in regard to the sin nature, identifying its activities, or failure to deal with personal sins results in a state of perpetuated carnality. Hos. 4:6
  7. If this state is not dealt with via rebound and the necessary adjustments in the thinking and life, said believer begins the process of reversionism.
  8. Therefore, any ministry that minimizes or rejects the importance of rebound is by definition a ministry that promotes reversionism, albeit unwittingly in some cases.
- F. Once one has entered a state of perpetuated carnality (whether through rejection of doctrine, unconfessed sin, or a combination of the two), he is no longer advancing spiritually; this renders the maturity adjustment an impossibility.
  - G. The believer that has advanced to the point of the maturity adjustment, and subsequently enters reversionism, undergoes the same processes as those who become reversionists prior to making the maturity adjustment. Heb. 6:7
  - H. Even if a believer had reached maturity, it is possible for him to fall into reversionism, which neutralizes the possibility of completing his course and obtaining the wreath. IITim. 4:7-8
  - I. It is important to note that the reversionist cannot produce Divine good (apart from spiritual recovery), but his previous production will be rewarded. Heb. 6:10

#### IV. Categories of reversionism.

- A. There are as many potential categories of reversionism as there are areas of sinning; therefore, an exhaustive list would require categorizing every possible area of personal sinning in the Bible.
- B. This doctrine will include the major areas of reversionism, which are the most prevalent among believers.
- C. Mental attitude sin reversionism.
  1. While the mental attitude sins are the least obvious, it is readily recognized that they are the most numerous, and form the basis for various verbal and overt sins.
  2. Any believer who fails to recognize and deal with the mental attitude sins he commits, establishes the possibility of becoming a mental attitude reversionist.
  3. Mental attitude reversionism explains why many believers may seem to be overtly obedient (going to church, doing good deeds, obeying the law, etc.) and are still to be categorized as reversionists.
  4. Mental attitude sins that can lead to mental attitude reversionism include, but are not limited to:
    - a. Anger. Gen. 49:6-7
    - b. Bitterness. Acts 8:23
    - c. Unforgiveness. Matt. 6:15
    - d. Implacability. IITim. 3:3
    - e. Malice. Rom. 1:29
    - f. Vindictiveness.; Rom. 12:19
    - g. Deceit/guile Gen. 29:25, 31:41
    - h. Envy/Jealousy. Gen. 37 cf. Acts 7:9
    - i. Worry. Matt.6:25,27,28,31, 13:22
    - j. Fear. Matt. 10:26,28,31
    - k. Hatred. Gen. 37:4-8
    - l. Sinful judging. Rom. 14:3-13
    - m. Pride/arrogance. IICChron. 26:16

- n. Lust. Matt. 5:28
  - o. Rebellion. ISam. 15:22-23
  - p. Greed/love of money. Rom. 1:29; ITim. 6:10
- D. Verbal reversionism.
1. Verbal sinning does not exist apart from some mental attitude sin that prompts a verbal sin; this is likely the second most numerous type of sin.
  2. As with mental attitude reversionism, believers who fail to acknowledge and deal with this area of sinning are candidates for becoming verbal reversionists.
  3. Areas of verbal sinning include:
    - a. Lying. Acts 5:3
    - b. Flattery. Prov. 26:28; Rom. 16:18
    - c. Gossiping ITim. 3:11, 5:13
    - d. Slander/maligning. ICor. 5:11
    - e. Reviling/abusive speech. ICor. 5:11
    - f. Boasting. James 3:5; Dan. 7:8,20
    - g. Cursing. James 3:9-10
    - h. Blasphemy. ITim. 1:20
    - i. Grumbling/complaining. Phil. 2:14; James 5:9
    - j. Strife/debate/quarreling. ITim. 6:4
- E. Overt forms of reversionism.
1. While this is the most perceptible form of sinning among believers, overt sins are generally not as prevalent as mental attitude sins or verbal sins.
  2. However, the overt forms of sinning are often preceded by mental attitude and verbal sins.
  3. The general areas of overt reversionism may manifest themselves in a variety of forms.
  4. Monetary. ICor. 5:11; ITim. 6:9-10 The monetary reversionist may be a dishonest businessman, may cheat the government out of taxes, may be a prostitute, or may engage in criminal activity in order to attempt to satisfy the love for money.
  5. Sexual. ICor. 5:11, 6:9 The sexual reversionist may engage in various forms of sexual immorality, which include normal perversion (heterosexual fornication, adultery) and abnormal perversion (homosexuality, bestiality, necrophilia, pedophilia, etc.).
  6. Addictive. ICor. 5:11, 6:9 This category of sinning includes things that society deems to be acceptable, and which may not be sinful in themselves but become sinful when abused, (alcohol, prescription drugs, gambling, food, details of life), and things that society does not deem to be acceptable (illicit drugs, sexual addictions).
  7. Criminal activity/anti-establishment activity. Rom. 13:1-7; IPet. 4:15 This area includes everything from petty criminal activity to organized crime. It includes those that engage in identity theft, credit card fraud, and writing bad checks to those that engage in murder, money laundering, wholesale drug importers, etc.
  8. Religious reversionism. ICor. 5:11; Rom. 16:17-18; ITim. 4:1ff; IITim. 2:16-18, 3:5-8, 4:3-4; IIPet. 2:1ff; Rev. 17 This includes those that follow the traditions of men, denominationalism, legalists, works oriented ministries, liberal theologians, and cults.
  9. Acting as a busybody. IIThess. 3:11; ITim. 5:13 This type of person intrudes into circles that do not pertain to them; they are overly curious, obtrusive, and meddle in things that do not concern them, or with which they are unqualified to deal. IPet. 4:15

- V. The process of reversionism.
- A. There are certain obvious, and not so obvious, factors that contribute to the process of a believer going into reversionism.
1. Lack of an adequate frame of reference in regard to the sin nature and what constitutes personal sinning makes the believer susceptible to perpetuating carnality. Hos. 4:6; Prov. 1:1-6,32-33, 2:10-22; ITim.1:8-9
  2. Failure to deal with the personal sins via rebound. IJn. 1:9
    - a. Failure to rebound results in the believer walking in darkness. IJn. 1:6-7; Ps. 32
    - b. False beliefs with respect to the sin nature and the reality of personal sinning may cause one to rationalize STA activity. IJn. 1:8,10
  3. Various factors can cause the believer to react to his niche and begin to reject certain principles of Bible doctrine; these are known as reactor factors, which include but are not limited to:
    - a. Boredom/the four walls test.
    - b. Loneliness/lack of fellowship test.
    - c. Frustration/patience and faith-rest test.
    - d. Self-pity/the martyr complex.
    - e. Disillusionment/things have not turned out as I wanted test.
    - f. Rejection/test for applying doctrine and being rejected by others.
    - g. Rebellion/failure to orient to authority test.
    - h. Monetary/job testing.
  4. These factors can arise in any area of the life, and may affect RM/RW, family, friends, job, finances, social life, or the details..
  5. If one does not identify these tendencies and deal with them by applying resident doctrine and rebound, he takes the first step toward reversionism.
  6. Bible class is an absolute necessity during times of difficulty so one can continually be confronted with the truth, be challenged to deal with the sin nature, and obtain the encouragement of other positive believers.
  7. One should recognize that reversionism can befall any believer without regard to the amount of time that he has been exposed to the truth. Mk. 4:16-19; Heb. 6:4-8
- B. The next development in the path toward reversionism is the frantic search for happiness (FSH).
1. The believer who comes under any of the above reactor factors may begin to react and seek relief through some other means than applying doctrine to the test.
  2. He abandons his position of humility and faith-rest, and begins to pursue other things in order to achieve what happiness may be available to him. IPet. 5:6-7
  3. He may begin to rationalize his actions/reactions with such human viewpoint ideas as:
    - a. Other believers are doing this and they don't seem to be suffering any consequences.
    - b. I deserve more in life than this.
    - c. Is all this sacrifice and pressure worth it?
    - d. If God was for me, things would be better.
    - e. Why shouldn't I have what I want?
    - f. What I am pursuing isn't sinful, so it must be legitimate.
    - g. I have applied enough, let others make the sacrifices.
- C. Next, God intervenes in the life of the believer under the principle of Divine discipline.

1. The frantic search for happiness manifests a form of arrogance under the STA, which results in Divine discipline (DD) for the believer. James. 4:4-7
  2. The believer begins to suffer various problems in his life, including but not limited to reversals in his personal life, health, family life, finances, and business ventures. Gen. 29,30
  3. The first stages of Divine discipline are called warning discipline, which will continue to intensify if the believer does not begin to move toward recovery. Heb. 12:12-13
  4. Discipline will escalate and continue to intensify for the believer that will not humble himself, turn from his own chosen paths, rebound, and correct his course. IIThess. 3:14; Rev. 2:21-22 cf. Lev. 26:14-39
  5. God will actively work to frustrate the believer, who will find that he cannot succeed no matter how diligently he pursues his agenda. Hos. 2:5-7
  6. In some cases, God may simply allow the believer to succeed in his evil, which may result in some very misplaced confidence. Eccles. 7:25
- D. If not checked, the process will continue to intensify.
1. If the believer does not heed the warning signs, disregards the Divine discipline that comes into his life, and deal with the problems via rebound and course correction, this pattern repeats itself.
  2. Further sinning under the STA brings more severe forms of discipline.
  3. Further discipline may irritate and provoke the believer, who is engaged under the sin nature, and thus intensify his reactions.
  4. The more the believer engages under the sin nature and refuses to correct his course, the more this process continues to repeat and intensify until the believer comes under the final form of Divine discipline.
  5. During this time one may observe a believer engaging in activities which were previously considered repugnant. ISam. 28:7ff
  6. Those who were previously considered off-limits as God's enemies become the associates of the reversionist. Gen. 13:12-13
- E. The final stage of discipline is the sin unto death (SUD), when God overrules the believer because he refuses to make the spiritual corrections that would effect his recovery. Gen. 35:16-20; IChron. 10:13-14; Jer. 44:11-12; IJn. 5:16
- F. During this process, the believer will experience emotional revolt of the soul (more accurately emotional control of the soul).
1. The believer who embarks upon the path of reversionism yields control of the soul to the sin nature on a more regular basis while he is regressing spiritually. Rom. 6:19-20 *See Doctrine of the Rulership of life*
  2. When the sin nature is in the position of rulership, the body rules the soul; this results in STA reactions becoming the normal response. James 4:1-3
  3. The emotions become tainted by the STA; STA reactions come to have priority over doctrine, causing the believer to reject the authority of God and His Word.
  4. This emotional revolt results in broad emotional swings, as the believer becomes a slave to the emotions, which now begin to dictate policy. Rom. 16:18
  5. The Exodus generation demonstrated many of the manifestations of emotional control of the soul.
    - a. Rejection of authority. Ex. 15:24
    - b. Blaming God, or his delegated authorities. Ex. 16:2,7-8

- c. Lack of faith rest. Ex. 14:10ff
  - d. Living in the past or future. Ex. 14:12
  - e. Severe mood swings. Num. 14:1,39-40
  - f. Complaining. Ex. 16:3
- G. As this process continues down the gory road, further rejection of Bible doctrine becomes the normative response.
1. During this process, if the believer was intellectually honest, he would readily acknowledge the fact that he is not as interested in Bible doctrine he had previously been. Heb. 10:32ff
  2. The believer then begins to rationalize his indifference to the intake and application of doctrine with various excuses.
  3. As his priorities become more corrupted, the believer finds that he does not have the time or inclination to attend Bible class, listen to the class he missed, or apply under his spiritual gift.
  4. However, the reversionist has the time to read the latest cosmic novel, watch television for hours, attend sporting events, concerts, or movies, shop for hours, and associate with other reversionists.
  5. During this process they often begin to manifest problems with other positive believers and/or the pastor, but gravitate to others that are negative or going negative.
  6. During this time, believers may take issue with the content of the pulpit, questioning the direction the pastor-teacher has chosen, what book he is teaching, what doctrines he covers, etc.
  7. During this process, whatever doctrine the believer had begins to be corrupted and may be rejected and purged from his thinking. Mk. 4:24-25
  8. You may hear the reversionist actively rejecting doctrines he once believed, espousing human viewpoint to replace that doctrine, and even replacing the truth with the doctrines of demons.
  9. It should be noted that some reversionists (particularly religious reversionists) often do not manifest overt antagonism toward Bible doctrine; they may simply revert to an inferior form of Christianity, compromising the doctrines of the faith with various forms of inferior or false doctrines. Rev. 2:14-15
  10. Others may exhibit the lukewarm syndrome by leaving a sound doctrinal church, moving to a non-doctrinal church, and engaging in the overt observances of Christianity, but lacking the true substance and power of Bible doctrine. IITim. 3:5; Rev. 3:16
- H. Rejection of doctrine and perpetuated carnality then begin to work in tandem, causing further rejection of doctrine and increasing perpetuated carnality.

## VI. The results of reversionism.

- A. The reversionist will come to experience a number of negative things in his life; these are in no particular order, and may very well occur in conjunction with one or more of these destructive consequences.
- B. The believer that moves down the path of reversionism will experience the hardening of the heart.
  1. This process begins when the believer will not respond to the warning discipline that comes upon him for his STA activity or rejection of doctrine. Jere. 5:3,23

2. The believer hardens his heart, which indicates a refusal to change his mind and correct his course. Ps. 95:8ff This is also referred to as stiffening the neck. Jer. 7:26, 17:23
  3. When a believer entrenches himself in his lifestyle in disregard of the truth, and in spite of the Divine discipline that is coming upon him, he will eventually face the ultimate discipline. Prov. 28:14, 29:1
  4. When a believer chooses to harden his heart, this brings further discipline from the Lord, by which He judicially begins to harden the heart of the believer that refuses to make a course correction. Prov. 28:14; Isa. 63:17; Mk. 6:52
  5. One of the Royal imperatives commands the believer not to harden his heart; such activity only provokes God to anger. Heb. 3:8,15
  6. While Divine discipline is designed to soften the positive believer and bring about a course correction, it has the opposite hardening effect on those that are ultimately negative. Heb. 12:11
- C. The process of the believer hardening his heart produces scar tissue on the soul.
1. While the hardness of heart syndrome is a characteristic quality of unbelievers (Eph. 4:18), it can happen to the believer that has been beguiled by his own deceitful sin nature. Heb. 3:13
  2. This begins to affect the conscience, which is that area of the soul that is programmed with one's norms and standards. Rom. 2:14-15
  3. Those who program the conscience with God's norms and standards and conduct their lives according to those righteous standards are said to have a good conscience. I Tim. 1:19
  4. The conscience is that faculty of the soul that judges our thoughts and actions; when our thoughts and actions are compatible with righteousness, the conscience commends us; when our thoughts and actions are incompatible with righteousness, the conscience condemns us.
  5. Scar tissue comes about as a result of ignoring or rejecting the dictates of the good conscience and rationalizing the pursuit of that which is forbidden. Eph. 4:19
    - a. While the previous verse deals with unbelievers by interpretation, it is a process that can occur in the life of believers who choose to harden their hearts.
    - b. The Greek verb ἀπαλγέω (apalgeo) literally means to become without pain or feeling; it is used to denote those that are not bothered by the implications of what they are doing, those lacking a good sense of right and wrong.
  6. As one violates a norm on a repeated basis he builds up a callus or scar tissue over that standard, and eventually that standard no longer functions as it should. I Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:15
    - a. Each correct standard in the conscience may be likened to a spiritual nerve ending; when one violates that standard on an ongoing basis, that nerve eventually becomes desensitized, and can no longer fulfill its purpose.
    - b. Just as a nerve ending may become callused or scarred and not send the appropriate pain signal to the brain, even so, when one violates the conscience on a regular basis, it eventually becomes desensitized and the believer does not experience the appropriate guilt and/or shame. Zeph. 3:5; II Thess. 3:14
  7. When the believer continues to violate the standards of righteousness, but does not feel the appropriate guilt or shame, he will not deal with that violation via rebound and course correction.

8. This further perpetuates the state of carnality, intensifying his self-delusion that he is acceptable to God in this state.
  9. This explains why some individuals can regress to the point that they can engage in very reprehensible activities, and have absolutely no remorse.
- D. Objects become reversed in the thinking of the reversionist.
1. The believer that fails to rebound and correct his course will find in the reversionism process that objects become reversed in his thinking.
  2. Some refer to this aspect as reverse process reversionism, but it is simply another result of the reversionism process and not a separate form of reversionism.
  3. That which used to be acceptable and correct to the positive believer becomes unacceptable and is rejected by the reversionist. Ps. 36:4, 52:3
  4. The believer falls into the good is evil syndrome. Isa. 5:20
  5. They may eventually reject the pastor-teacher, the environment of the local church, and separate from other positive believers; instead, they will choose to gravitate to activities and people that are compatible with their form of reversionism. IITim. 4:10
  6. In fact, you will likely observe the reversionist engaging in the very things he used to condemn and rightly ridicule, and associating with those from whom he had rightly separated, as he deteriorates in his thinking, conscience, and perceptions.
- E. The reversionist becomes quite susceptible to false doctrine and opens the door to false/demonic teachings.
1. As this process continues to intensify and escalate, the maladjusted believer is exposed to teachings and concepts other than the straight and narrow of sound doctrine.
  2. Just as nature does not tend to allow a vacuum, but eventually fills that which is empty, so spiritual vacuums that are produced by the rejection of the light are eventually filled with darkness and deception. Rom. 1:21
  3. As the believer continues to pursue his self-chosen course away from the Lord, he may become immersed more deeply in the darkness of error. Prov. 2:13
  4. The soul develops and manifests an affinity for human viewpoint darkness and the doctrines of demons, who desire to enslave mankind with their depraved thinking. Eph. 6:12; ITim. 4:1ff
  5. False doctrines, which the believer would have rightly ridiculed and rejected at one time, are accepted and embraced, resulting in further spiritual corruption, discipline, misery, and ultimate loss.
  6. This aspect of reversionism demonstrates the reality that, **"A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."** IIPet. 2:22
- F. The reversionist will find that his thinking processes will deteriorate and he will experience various forms of mental instability.
1. It is logical to expect that all these forms of spiritual instability may manifest themselves in various forms of mental instability.
  2. The reversionist will eventually enter into a form of psychosis (loss of contact with spiritual reality, typically accompanied by delusions), and experience various mental aberrations, which will depend on the degree and type of spiritual insanity to which they descend.
  3. God warned the Jews in the Mosaic Law that this would come upon those that departed the straight and narrow for the gory road. Deut. 28:13-15,28

4. Solomon acknowledged that there was a certain misplaced confidence that came from the success of evil, as well as a form of insanity that comes from folly (the propensity to make bad choices). Eccles. 7:25, 10:13
5. Due to negative volition, mankind is viewed as being insane under the influence of the indwelling sin nature; the only thing that protects the positive believer from his own irrationality is the sound doctrine he pursues and applies. Eccles. 9:3; Rom. 12:2
6. The insanity of the reversionist is demonstrated by:
  - a. The Exodus Generation.
  - b. Balaam was a monetary reversionist that demonstrated the principle that even a prophet of God was not above this form of insanity. Num. 22:7,17; IIPet. 2:16
  - c. Samson, who engaged in sexual reversionism. Judges 13:24, 16:20
  - d. Saul, who became a reversionist based on his arrogance. ISam. 13:8-14, 15:1-3,10-11, 16:14,23, 18:8-11, 20:30ff, 22:6ff, 28:7
  - e. Solomon, who also pursued sex to excess, which then led to religious reversionism. IKings 11:1-9

G. The final result of reversionism is the physical death of the reversionist.

## VII. The two possible conclusions to reversionism.

### A. Reversion recovery.

1. The directive will of God is for the believer to avoid the process of reversionism; however, if he embarks on the gory road, the will of God is for him to make a spiritual recovery and resume his advance on the glory road.
2. There are a number of ways in which the Lord commands believers to avoid reversionism.
  - a. Let us not sleep, denoting the spiritual insensitivity of the reversionist. IThess. 5:6
  - b. Let us be sober, denoting his intoxication under the STA. IThess. 5:8
  - c. Make straight paths, denoting that the reversionist deviates from the straight and narrow. Heb. 12:13
  - d. Let us fear, denoting that the reversionist does not have the appropriate fear of God. Heb. 4:1, 10:31
3. Similarly, there are exhortations to recover from this state.
  - a. Calls to return. Gen. 31:3,13; ISam. 7:3; Isa. 55:7; Joel 2:13
  - b. Wake up. Eph. 5:14; Rev. 3:2-3
  - c. Repent. Rev. 2:5,16, 3:3,19
  - d. James 4:7-10 gives a series of commands related to reversion recovery.
    - 1.) The believer must acknowledge and abandon his rebellion against the Lord, which has produced a submission to Satan. vs. 7 cf. IITim. 2:26
    - 2.) The believer must intensify his pursuit of God through prayer and the intake of Bible doctrine. vs. 8a
    - 3.) He must address his sins via rebound. 8b
    - 4.) He must be willing to make wholesale changes in his fundamental beliefs, which have obviously been flawed. 8b
    - 5.) He must be willing to endure whatever lute comes to him, both the sorrow that comes from rejecting his errors and whatever residual discipline may remain. vs. 9a

- 6.) As he gloried in his shame, he must now endure the misery of recognizing his shameful behavior. vs. 9b cf. Phil. 3:19
  - 7.) He must reject his arrogance and humble himself before the Lord, waiting for God to raise him up. vs. 10
4. God promises mercy for those who will return to Him. Isa. 44:21-22; Jere. 24:4-7; Hos. 6:1, 14:4; Joel 2:12-13
  5. Some believers go through a period of reversionism, with its inevitable spiritual decline, enduring the attendant discipline and misery, and then make a full recovery.
    - a. Jacob. Gen. 31:4
    - b. Samson. Jud. 16:28ff; Heb. 11:32
    - c. David. Ps. 38,51
      1. The incidental sins of adultery and murder placed David into the state of carnality; however, David chose to perpetuate that state by refusing to rebound. Ps. 32:3-4
      2. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed Uriah, it must be observed that aspects of Divine discipline never left David for the rest of his life. IISam. 12:10-12
    - d. Solomon. IKings 11:1ff; Ecclesiastes
    - e. The Jews. Ezek. 37
    - f. The incestuous Corinthian. IICor. 2:5-8
  6. The means to reversion recovery include:
    - a. First and foremost the believer must acknowledge his sin via rebound, and then he must separate from his particular form of reversionism. IJn. 1:9
    - b. There is no spiritual recovery for those who continue with the STA activity or the rejection of doctrine that caused their reversionism in the first place. Heb. 10:26
    - c. It requires the believer to repent (change his mind about his sin or rejection of certain doctrines). Rev. 3:19 cf. IICor. 12:21
    - d. The repentant believer must be willing to orient to whatever residual discipline he may have incurred. Heb. 12:3ff
    - e. This also involves the removal of scar tissue from the soul, which may be a painful process and involve some significant λύπη (lupe). This refers to the pain, sorrow, or distress that is involved in an appropriate recovery, as well as whatever residual discipline may remain. IICor. 7:10; Heb. 12:11
    - f. He should intensify his intake and application of Bible doctrine, since occupation with Christ is his primary need. Heb. 5:11-6:1a
    - g. He may have to further humble himself and call for spiritual support if necessary. James. 5:13ff
    - h. He should seek and rely on the comfort and encouragement that should be provided by other positive believers. IICor. 2:7-8
    - i. The recovering believer should avail himself of the spiritual weapon of prayer, spending a maximum amount of time using this spiritual resource. Col. 4:2
- B. Reversionism without recovery is the other alternative, which culminates in the sin unto death.
1. One very real danger of reversionism is that the believer may assume and become convinced that recovery will begin “tomorrow”. Heb. 4:7

2. Another danger is that the believer may rationalize his reversion, deceiving himself into believing that he is not in reversionism when he is. Rev. 3:16-17
3. The frightening reality is that there is a point (a period of rejection) beyond which it becomes impossible for one to make a spiritual recovery. Hos. 5:4; Mic. 2:3; Heb. 6:6ff
4. It appears that at least three factors have an impact on the potential for reversion recovery. Heb. 6:4-8
  - a. The length of time one has been exposed to the truth.
  - b. The level and consistency of the sound doctrine that one has received.
  - c. The degree to which the believer has engaged in rejecting the truth or the extent to which he has engaged in STA activity.
5. The more sound teaching that one has received (his level of culpability), and the extent to which one has repudiated Bible doctrine, impacts profoundly upon the possibility for reversion recovery.
6. The difficulty in reversion recovery does not lie with God; it lies with the person that has perpetuated his choice of darkness over light. Matt. 19:26; IITim. 2:13
7. Examples of reversionists who did not recover.
  - a. Lot. Gen. 19:30ff
  - b. Rachel. Gen. 35:16-18
  - c. Saul. IChron. 10:13
  - d. Joab. IKings 2:28-34
  - e. The Exodus generation. Num. 14:29ff
  - f. Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:1-11

- VIII. In the Mosaic Law, the law of leprosy makes a typological distinction between incidental sinning, more serious sinning, and reversionism. Lev. 13-14
- A. Although referred to as the law of leprosy, the Hebrew term **צַרְעַת** (tsara'ath) referred to a wider range of skin diseases than just leprosy. *For consistency we will use leprosy*
  - B. Diseases with eruptions that affected the skin could range from the mild and benign to the dangerous and highly contagious.
  - C. Various skin disorders were possible due to such things as swelling, scabs, boils, burning of the skin or even simple infections. Lev. 13:2,18,24,29
  - D. When dealing with houses, the term **leprosy** is not actually used; the situation with homes included discoloration, mold, mildew, or anything that might indicate the onset of some illness or infestation.
  - E. The priests were responsible to monitor such developments and make decisions in regard to the individual or object in question. Lev. 13:3,8,10,20
  - F. The priest was responsible to determine if the skin disorder was something as simple as a stain or eczema, or if it was the more serious matter of a communicable, infectious disease.
  - G. He was not to rush through this process, but he was to take the prescribed time to determine the true nature of the case before him. 13:4,5
  - H. Some cases of leprosy could be readily identified, and the individual so diagnosed with leprosy was immediately pronounced unclean, was separated from the group, and forced to live in isolation. 13:24-25,46
  - I. However, there was a chronic form of leprosy that rendered the individual unclean, but did not demand isolation from the community. Lev. 13:9-11

- J. If the priest determined that clothing or houses had contracted leprosy, both were to be quarantined to determine if further action was in order. Lev. 13:47,50, 14:34,38
- K. In the case of clothing, it was to be destroyed by fire; in the case of dwellings, the infected area was to be replaced and the rest of the house was to be thoroughly cleansed. Lev. 13:52, 14:40-42
- L. If the leprosy reappeared in the dwelling, it was to be immediately razed. Lev. 14:43-45
- M. Anyone who came into contact with a leper or a leprous house contracted ceremonial uncleanness. Lev. 14:46
- N. While there was no human method for healing the leper, God could and did cure people of this malady. Lev. 14:1-3
- O. The typological significance explained.
  - 1. The priest is typical of the positive advancing believer/priest who possesses and exercises discernment in regard to spiritual matters, and is qualified to make judgments. ICor. 2:14
  - 2. Common skin disorders which were superficial and benign typify incidental sinning, which is no cause for alarm when it is acknowledged and confessed in rebound.
  - 3. However, believers must exercise an appropriate fear respecting sin, since incidental sinning that is not addressed can quickly become a full-blown STA problem. Heb. 4:1, 12:1
  - 4. Leprosy is typical of reversionism, which status renders the believer unclean and demands separation; he then becomes off limits to other positive believers under the principle of corporate discipline. ICor. 5:1ff; ITim. 1:20
  - 5. The chronic form of leprosy typifies a sinful state in which positive believers are to remain aloof from the believer in question; however, the more severe corporate separation is not necessary. IIThess. 3:6,14
  - 6. One could contract leprosy through various means, which are typical of some of the ways that believers can react to their niches and begin the reversionism process.
    - a. Basic skin problems are typical of incidental sinning, which must be monitored because it can progress to reversionism. Lev. 13:1-8
    - b. Since boils were often a feature of Divine discipline, the boil typifies a believer that reacts to his discipline and moves toward reversionism. Lev. 13:18ff cf. Ex. 9:9-11; Deut. 28:27,35; Heb. 12:3
    - c. The skin being burned by fire is used to illustrate the fact that a believer can react to his testing and move toward reversionism. Lev. 13:24ff cf. IPet. 1:6-7, 4:12
    - d. Leprosy that appeared on the face or forehead symbolizes the arrogance, obstinance, and rejection of authority that leads some into reversionism. Lev. 13:29,42 cf. Isa. 48:4; Jer. 3:3
  - 7. The particulars for the ritual cleansing of the leper are designed to focus the believer on the person and work of Christ. Lev. 14:1ff
- IX. The prescribed application of doctrine towards reversionists is separation. Rom. 16:17-18; Tit. 3:10; IIJn. 1:10
  - A. Since all believers sin on a daily basis, incidental sinning is not a reason to separate from another positive, advancing believer.
    - 1. Some believers have attempted to use the doctrine of separation as an excuse to separate from another believer based on personal likes and dislikes.

2. When another positive, adjusting believer's area of sinning is not to your liking, it is a test of your grace orientation to accept that believer and treat them with the same grace you desire. Matt. 7:12; Rom. 14:10
- B. Therefore, the doctrine of separation is not one to be applied toward other positive, advancing believers that are consistent in class, even if their rate of growth, or level of application does not suit you.
- C. However, when a believer begins to manifest a habitual willingness to sin in a particular area, one must exercise caution and may need to withdraw social approval by refusing to socialize with that believer. II Thess. 3:6
  1. This is not an excuse to treat that believer as an enemy. II Thess. 3:15
  2. This is merely a tool to help bring that believer to the recognition of his failure, so he can deal with it. II Thess. 3:14
  3. One must keep the lines of communication open and be willing to exhort and encourage any believer that may be struggling. II Thess. 3:15
- D. When a believer openly attacks the doctrine, begins to espouse false or heretical doctrine, or engages in flagrant sinning without remorse, that believer is to come under corporate separation.
  1. The most notable examples in the New Testament are the incestuous Corinthian, Hymenaeus and Alexander. I Cor. 5:1ff; I Tim. 1:20
  2. Paul sets the example that leaderships deal with the errant believers first, and then issues the command to the congregation to enforce the separation. I Cor. 5:2,7; II Thess. 3:6
- E. One must always remember that one purpose of the doctrine of separation is to bring the erring believer to shame; however, the ultimate purpose is to facilitate his spiritual recovery. Gal. 6:1-2
- F. The believer cannot use the doctrine of separation from reversionists to absolve himself of the responsibility to apply other doctrines that are incumbent on him.
  1. The believer cannot use the fact that his parents are reversionists to avoid providing whatever financial help they may need in their old age. Mk. 7:10-13; I Tim. 5:4,8
  2. One cannot use the doctrine of separation in order to liberate himself from a marriage to a negative spouse. I Cor. 7:12-13

## X. Conclusions.

- A. While all believers are positive at one point in their lives, positive volition to the gospel does not guarantee anything in terms of positive volition with respect to Ph<sub>2</sub>.
- B. It is likely that there exists a category of believer that accepts the gospel and is not positive beyond that point; therefore, he makes the salvation adjustment and immediately reverts to the pre-salvation way of life.
- C. However, there is another category of believer that makes the salvation adjustment, is exposed to a superficial form of teaching, rejects what light he was given, and regresses from there to an inferior spiritual state.
- D. The most significant form of reversionism is found among those that were sufficiently positive after salvation, were blessed with sound doctrinal teaching, embraced that teaching, and then repudiated it after some time.
- E. These believers are the most culpable and will come under the greatest degree of discipline and loss at the Bema Seat. Lk. 12:47-48; I Jn. 2:28

- F. One should also recognize that there are those obvious reversionists, who engage in obvious STA activity (drugs, drunkenness, sexual sins, bitterness, unforgiveness), and the more subtle reversionist, who are lukewarm, but have a façade of acceptability. IITim. 3:5-7
- G. While those that undergo this process ultimately align themselves with cosmic thinking and/or satanic thinking, the symptoms and results of their reversionism may vary from the barely perceptible to the glaringly obvious.
- H. One danger that exists for the positive believer is that he may react to the seeming prosperity or lack of pressure that the reversionist may exhibit. IIPet. 2:18-19; Ps. 73:1-14
- I. However, the doctrines we learn in Bible class (such as this one) are designed to provide insight, strength, and stability to the positive believer when he is confronted with the prosperity of the negative. Ps. 73:15-28
- J. One must recognize that the cosmos and Satan may prosper those that reject sound doctrine, and are willing align themselves with the cosmic/satanic thinking.
- K. Another danger that exists for the positive believer is to not recognize the true nature of positive volition, which may experience periods of difficulty, failure, and spiritual struggle, but remains positive.
- L. Therefore, one must be very careful in being too quick to pass spiritual judgment and categorize another believer as a reversionist, without taking the necessary time and making the necessary observations.
- M. By definition, those that have been exposed to sound teaching, repudiate that teaching by rejecting various doctrines, and abandon face-to-face teaching, are reversionists.
- N. Since such is the case, several areas are quite necessary and important to maintain Ph<sub>2</sub> spiritual momentum, and should be monitored carefully.
  - 1. Attendance in Bible class. Heb. 10:25
  - 2. Attitude toward the pastor-teacher and other spiritual authorities. Heb. 13:17
  - 3. Attitude toward doctrines, particularly those that expose or irritate an area of weakness. Jn. 3:20
  - 4. Attitude toward the faith, the good deposit, which is to be guarded against attack, especially in these last days. IITim. 1:13-14; Jude 3
  - 5. Consistent STA activity, which one does not want to confess or address. IJn. 1:9
- O. Paul's advice to Timothy is sound advice for one that desires to avoid the pitfall of reversionism. ITim. 4:16
  - 1. Paying close attention to yourself means that one consistently monitors STA activity and is consistent in applying rebound.
  - 2. Paying close attention to the teaching demonstrates tenacity with regard to the doctrine being taught.
  - 3. Persevere in these things means that one is to continue with the path of that form of teaching to which you have been committed. Rom. 6:17
  - 4. These things will guarantee Ph<sub>2</sub> deliverance from the domination of the STA, as well as Ph<sub>3</sub> vindication at the Bema Seat.

*"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."  
Lk. 9:62*