

7 Steps to Spiritual Defeat

When we talk about 'spiritual retreat,' it's obvious that we're talking about the process of reversionism, the very opposite of progress in the Christian Life. Hebrews 10:37-39 gives us the divine evaluation of the believer in the midst of reversionism, the spiritual champion turned spiritual coward. The passage says,

"For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

3 Basic Description of a Reversionistic Life

The reversionistic life is centered on serving self rather than serving God.
The reversionistic life displeases God because of its inconsistency with divine integrity.
The reversionistic life dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:17-18

Pay close attention; this passage may be describing the path some of us are on. Paul writes, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord." In other words, I'm speaking not just from my own opinion as an apostle of Christ, and not just from what I believe, but from the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What I'm about to tell you has all the authority of our Savior and our King behind it.

Step one: Rejection of the Word

Rejection of the Word and God's will usually results from reaction in the life, from a prolonged detour into reactionary attitudes and emotions like: boredom, bitterness, disillusionment, discouragement, jealousy, anger, self-righteousness, self pity, and an inability to be satisfied with anything in life. "That you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk."

This is a believer living like an unbeliever. And that comes from only one thing: a rejection of the Word of God. When we allow ourselves to develop an attitude of apathy and indifference to the Word of God, when Bible study is just another social event with little or no real significance, we're already in the first stage. This is the "walk," or really, the 'lifestyle,' of carnality. (1 Corinthians 3) You can see carnality running rampant in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, where Paul said to the Corinthians,

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, and are you not walking like mere men?"

The fault which Paul finds and brings out so beautifully in this section is that they have allowed the OSN to so dominate their attitude, outlook and actions, that to the naked eye they paint a portrait of themselves as unbelievers, just another group of "mere men" living in carnality.

Back to Ephesians 4:17. The word "Gentiles," when used in the OT, referred to those nations that did not worship or reverence or respect the Lord God of Israel, Jesus Christ. Ethnos is the Greek term, and it can be translated 'heathen, unbelievers.' But he's talking to believers in Ephesus, not unbelievers, yet he uses several different phrases to describe for them in detail the pattern of an unbelieving life and how we, as children of God, can choose to follow that same path to destruction.

What I want you to see is this: that it's possible for a person who's trusted Christ, it's possible for a person who has eternal life, to live like an unbeliever. Paul is speaking to the Royal Family with a solemn warning and he says, "I'm challenging you and commanding you by the authority of Christ Himself: Don't you live in rejection of the Word of God as if you were an unbeliever."

Step two: Formation of the vacuum of the soul

"Futility" is *mataiotes* a vacuum in the soul. Living like an unbeliever results in a void in the soul, an emptiness devoid of truth. What does a vacuum do? It sucks in filth, sucks in dirt. You can make your soul just like a 12 amp Dirt Devil, and it'll suck in all the filth of the world, and eventually all the false doctrine you can handle! It will suck in the "doctrines of demons" spoken of in 1 Timothy 4:1. Why? Because when you become a believer in Jesus Christ you also become a new creation in Him; and your soul and newly created human spirit are designed to run on the Word of God.

If you reject the Word of God, you'll create a vacuum in your soul, and it will suck in false doctrine. That false doctrine will eventually destroy you! 'Vacuum' means lack of standards, lack of norms, lack of goals, lack of objectives, and lack of focus. You don't know where you're going, why you're here, or what it's all about. And furthermore, you don't care! That's a dangerous place to be, believer.

The mentality of the believer is designed for the Word of God, to feed on it daily and to operate by it experientially. The believer with a vacuum in his soul now attempts to fill the void with the things of the CS. Bible study, the place where we are to return again and again and again to be nourished and strengthened by the Bread of Life, ceases at this point. And the longer we stay out of fellowship with God, the easier it becomes to stay away from His Word and to neglect the one thing designed to be our spiritual food and spiritual drink.

Note the picture in Jeremiah 2:13. The prophet, speaking for the Lord God of Israel Jesus Christ says, "For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Jeremiah is not talking about Church Age believers; he's talking about the southern kingdom of Judah before its destruction by the Babylonian Empire. What I want you to see is the application.

The 1st evil is that "they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters." This is the believer who is preoccupied with comfort, possessions, success, people, everything except what truly matters. They no longer have time to study the Word; they're suddenly too busy for prayer, or reflection on divine viewpoint, or service in the plan of God. All the things that don't matter distract them from the one thing that does their personal relationship with the Son of God. When you and I turn our backs on God and our attention to other things, we're already there.

The 2nd evil occurs when God and His Word are rejected and the soul seeks fulfillment in other ways. To use the language of the v., they "hew for themselves ...broken cisterns that can hold no water." But God has so designed man that there is no other way to find fulfillment, other than living inside His will according to His Word. So, once you turn your back on the Lord, you have no access to the source of life, no way to fill the craving, the longing, the desire of your soul.

The more things you go after on your 'frantic search for happiness,' the more your soul like a broken cistern leaks; the more the soul leaks, the more frustrated you become; the more frustrated you become, the more intensely you seek after fulfillment outside the will of God! This is why in v. 19 the Lord delivers this warning, "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see," He say's, "that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God...."

The one thing that will keep us as children of God in the devil's world from being conformed to the spirit and attitudes and priorities of this age, is being "transformed by the renewing of" our minds, the renovation of our thinking (Romans 12:2).

Step three: Blackout of the soul

Ephesians 4:18 says, "being darkened in their understanding." The phrase translated "being darkened" in the NAS is the perf. pass. part. of Skotoo means- blind the mind, enshroud it in darkness; eimi is the verb of absolute existence, meaning- to be.

Notice the voice of the two participles: act. for eimi, implying the use of volition in producing this stage of reversionism; pass. for skotoo, meaning that as a result of actively choosing to follow this path, now this person has received a spiritual blindness a blackout of the soul.

The pres. tense of eimi plus the perf. part. focuses our attention on an action completed in the past with results continuing in the present. It could be translated- 'having become blind at some point in the past with the result that you are walking blindly at this very moment.' It means that 'through one conscious decision after another you have come to a state of spiritual darkness in your life and are living in that darkness even now.'

How can this happen to a believer, you ask? Once we reject the Word of God, which gives us light spiritual illumination and understanding once the mind becomes a vacuum accepting false philosophies and false teaching, then your soul, which is designed to run on the divine viewpoint of the Word, is going to shut down! Essentially, your soul is going to go into rebellion against you, just like you've gone into rebellion against God.

The blackout of the soul, by the way, can lead to psychosis; it can lead to neurosis, to sociopathic behavior and to all kinds of mental problems. As your inner defenses are being demolished, adversity now instantaneously becomes stress, nervousness becomes uncontrollable, fear stalks you constantly, anxiety and worry are your closest companions. Get the picture?

There are believers, you might know one right now, who have ended up in mental institutions because they followed this path. There wasn't anything wrong with them to begin with, they simply destroyed their soul! Think about this the next time negative volition, in all its arrogance, comes knocking at your door: Destroy your soul and you have nothing, nothing!

The word "understanding" is from (dianoia); it refers to 'the mind, the faculty of comprehension.' Notice that it's a compound word. Interestingly, dianoia is a noun, and when broken down you can see that it comes from the verb noeo, which means- 'perceive, comprehend, gain insight into something,' and the preposition dia, meaning- 'through;' lit.- a thorough comprehension. We know that perception of the Word, that understanding of the Word, takes place where? In the mind. According to *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the NT*, dianoia is a synonym for nous 'the mind.' Blackout of the soul is the satanic attack on the left lobe of the mentality.

The spiritual vacuum we studied in step two is the 'point of access,' it's the gateway for false doctrine, which is the viewpoint of Satan and his cosmic system. This, in turn, produces a blackout in the soul. The "understanding" being "darkened" is the blackout of light; it's the blackout of illumination from Doctrine learned in the past. One last principle under 'step three': Once we reject the necessity of Bible study in our lives, we begin to dismantle the structure of absolute truth in our souls.

Step four: A life alienated from the Life of God

"Excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them." This is the believer's entrance into a life alienated from God and His grace. The same thing Paul speaks of here happened to the Galatians. In Galatians 5:4 Paul said, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." He doesn't mean that they've lost their salvation. He's simply saying that there's no practical effect of their relationship with Christ for them, at that time.

The intimacy of fellowship with Him, the power of communion with the Person of Jesus Christ, is not a reality in this believer's life! They don't have the joy; they don't have the inner peace, they don't have the dynamic of the Spiritual Life! Why? Because they have established an alienation between themselves and Christ. For the Galatians it was

legalism, for another believer it might be some other form of arrogance and rebellion against the will of God. How many forms of arrogance and rebellion against the will of God are there? As many as there are believers existing on the face of the earth at this moment. This alienation might be 'legalism,' which is self-denial leading to self-righteousness, or 'lasciviousness,' which is carnality leading to chaos. Or another way of saying it is 'the licentiousness that leads to lawlessness.'

The phrase "excluded" means 'alienated,' alienated "from the life of God," which is spirituality and all the power that flows from it. There is an alienation that has taken place here; and let me tell you something: God's not the One Who created it!

The Greek word for "excluded" is the perf. part. of (apallotrioo). In the pass. voice it means- be alienated, estranged; be shut out from fellowship and intimacy. The perf. tense signifies that in this downward spiral away from the grace and power of God, the believer has come to a point of alienation and exclusion in the past, and remains in that state to this day. I.e., no attempt has been made to rectify the situation, to climb out of the 'pit of alienation.'

There are a lot of believers you may be one of them who look back and say, "You know, I can remember when I was really enthused about the Word of God, when I was really fired up for study and service. And now I'm not!" The reason is that they began a systematic process of tearing down the safeguard and protection of the soul. The principle is: If you don't take care of what you have in the soul whether it be doctrine, love, gratitude, or graciousness you will lose the ability to use it. These things have to be nourished, protected, and most of all, exercised!

In this 'process' the 'abundant life' is rejected for the 'deficient life;' the glorification of God is exchanged for the gratification of self. Volitionally, we've done two things: isolated ourselves spiritually; and alienated ourselves from the will of God. Instead of being 'set apart' from the world unto God which is our experiential sanctification by the Spirit we have 'set ourselves apart' from God unto the world.

I want you to see that the word for "life" in v. 18 is *zoe*. It means spiritual life, eternal life, and here as in John 10 the abundant life in Christ. Notice that alienation from this life, with all its power and all its provision, is a result of "ignorance" of doctrine. *Agnoia* lit. means 'no knowledge.' It has a specific usage in this passage, and therefore, we're going to translate it- 'ignorance of divine viewpoint.' Principle: A lack of knowledge and understanding is the root of all failure in the Christian life! Where does that lack of knowledge come from? It comes from negative volition to the Word of God.

Remember this principle: Communication of the Word is the root from which all spiritual fruit is borne. Without communication of the Word there can be no hearing; without hearing there is no faith; if no faith is exercised in the Word, there can be no growth; without growth there can be no character, and without character there will be no spiritual service! It all starts right there, with communication. This is a perfect description

of the believer who has turned his back on the Word of God, and thereby alienated himself from the grace of God.

Step five: Hardening of the kardi

"Because of the hardness of their heart" refers to the right lobe of the mentality, the place of thinking and application of information, becomes hardened, the soul scarred.

The word that's used for "hardness" is lit. 'scar tissue, the covering of a callous.' This is scar tissue of the soul. *Porosis* was a rather grim word. It comes from the noun *poros*, which originally referred to a stone that was harder than marble, a stone used frequently in buildings in the ancient world, especially their foundations. It was the closest thing they had to concrete. Eventually, it came to be used in a number of ways in the medical field.

- It was used for the chalkstone which can form in the joints and paralyze their action.
- It was used of the callous that forms where a bone has been broken and re-set, a callous which is actually harder than the bone itself.
- The verb *poroo*, which is derived from *poros*, means 'cover with a thick skin, harden by covering with a callous, petrify.' In the Greek mind these terms eventually came to mean the 'loss of all power of sensation.' They described something which had become so hardened, so petrified, that it had no power to feel at all. This is what happens to the soul in reversionism.

If you have any scars on your body, especially where the nerves have been damaged, you know that scars don't feel, the feeling is gone. What happens when your soul loses its sensitivity; what happens when your soul loses its ability to think objectively from divine viewpoint and to respond to that thinking? You no longer have the capacity for life, you no longer have the capacity for friendship, you no longer have the capacity for love. The things that used to thrill you in life, and motivate you and excite you in the plan of God, have no effect anymore. You are becoming soulishly deadened! This is the hardening process of the heart.

The "ignorance" in this passage, once again, is an ignorance of the Word of God; it is a willing and rebellious ignorance of His will and His Word. And when that ignorance sets in, when that rebellion against the Word solidifies, your soul starts to harden, to callous over with scar tissue; and you don't even notice it until the damage is already done! Unless this process is reversed, it has only one end that's death. You literally sin yourself to death under the maximum stage of divine discipline.

Steps six: Self-betrayal

Paul say's, "and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality." The rebel now betrays himself to a sin-nature gratification in the extreme. His inner misery triggers the insatiable desire for overt stimulation. This is a frantic search for anything in the cosmic system even remotely resembling satisfaction.

The Greek verb *apalgeo* means cease to feel; become insensitive, apathetic, beyond feeling. There is no responsiveness whatsoever, to pain, to honor, to grief, to shame nothing. We could translate it 'unfeeling, unresponsive.' In the perfect tense and passive voice this would be, "having cast off all feeling, all response, to the things of God." It's not that we have "become calloused" because of some outside force, but that we have calloused ourselves. As a result of our own negative choices, our sensitivity to the Spirit of God is gone, leaving a hunger in the soul that cannot be satisfied.

I want you to notice while we're here, that the phrase "given... over" is from the same word used over and over again in the Gospels of Judas' betrayal of the Lord. The only difference is that here you haven't betrayed another, you have betrayed yourself!

Look at this term "sensuality;" it comes from the Greek *aselgeia*, a word defined by one writer in the Golden Age of Greece as 'preparation for every pleasure.' It refers to the exploitation of the old sin nature in all of its lust patterns every aspect, every area. Whatever your particular area of weakness and arrogance happens to be, you saturate and satiate it to the utmost.

It comes from the root word *aselges*, which means- 'outrageous.' *Aselgeia* pictures an insolent disregard of any restraint on the OSN; it means- unbridled lust, shamelessness, debauchery. There is one characteristic, one idea here, that stands out above the rest. Let me ask you a question: What is it that characterizes the liar and the hypocrite? He tries to hide his sin, to cover it and conceal it. Right? Here's the point: The man or woman who is submersed in "sensuality," who has reached this stage of shameless excess, could care less about how much their lifestyle and attitude might shock public opinion, as long as they can gratify their own desires.

When a person betrays himself into "sensuality," what you have is a person who has so destroyed their capacity for life that they have to submerge themselves in self gratification just to find a reason to make it through another day. Our nation, in this time of historical crisis, is filled with believers yes, believers involved in this very thing the believer who habitually abuses drugs, or who is physically and psychologically addicted.

And it's possible, by the way, to have the latter without the former. What happens? He shoots up; he snorts some blow; he takes a pill; in whatever way, he gets high. The alcoholic: He drinks as much as it takes to get high. At first, maybe just a few beers or a few drinks.

The sex maniac: To begin with, a specific form of sex, then eventually any kind of sex, anywhere, anytime. Or, as psychiatry has discovered, this process will often be reversed. A person a believer in this case will start out experimenting with different things sexually only to find themselves addicted to a certain thing, a specific thing, which sometimes turns out to be an entirely non-sexual object like hair or feet or an article of clothing. That's called fetishism; this person has developed a fetish for a particular object or sexual activity.

Initially this person the drug addict, alcoholic or sexaholic feels wonderful. The pseudo-euphoria sets in, but you know as well as I do it doesn't last. And so the cycle repeats itself.

Now, there comes a time when whatever it was that got you high, or drunk, or euphoric, is not enough. It's not enough to give you that rush that thrill, that exhilaration. So, what do you have to do? You have to increase the dose, increase the amount, increase the risk; and you keep on pursuing that same high you got the first time, but it's never the same. On an increased dosage you get diminishing returns.

While increasing the dose you're increasing your frantic search for it, you're increasing your intense desire to regain it. And guess what's happening? It's getting less and less and less and less; it's getting farther and farther away because your body is no longer responding. Your tolerance for the drug has exceeded its effects!

That can happen in your soul. It can happen with drugs; it can happen with alcohol; it can happen with sex; it can happen with approbation lust and the desire for glory and honor and recognition. It can happen with power lust, with materialism, when you buy into the deception that 'things are going to make me happy.' It can happen with a multitude of things. Your soul is becoming, slowly but surely, deadened to everything that matters in the spiritual realm. This is 'self-betrayal into sensuality.'

What you have here is a believer in a state of overwhelming egocentricity: a total preoccupation with the things of the cosmic system, with the old sin nature, and with the false doctrine of the demonic realm, a total preoccupation with everything Satan has to offer which is contrary to Christ and contrary to the Word of God!

In this stage of 'spiritual retreat' the believer's sin now becomes idolatry and spiritual adultery. He worships the 'god of self,' and any other false god {small g} who comes his way promising some form of pseudo happiness of momentary satisfaction.

There is an excellent Biblical example of this 'frantic search for happiness' at the beginning of James 4:1 he asks these Jewish believers the question: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" Then he says in v. 2, "You lust and do not have; {so} you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; {so} you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God," . Let me give you some summary principles from this passage.

Intimacy with the cosmic system denotes hatred and hostility toward God. It is an outward sign of the inward attitude. This is but a symptom of which reversionism is the disease.

The desire for intimacy with the CS leads to enmity with God. In this person's life you begin to see a complete reversal of attitude and priorities.

The intimate companion of the world has "made himself," by his own choices, the enemy of God!

Then we get to the spiritual basement, the trash-bin of life. Paul say's, "for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

Step seven: total self-defilement in implacable lust

This is rock bottom for the believer. Notice the term "practice;" it means literally 'a working, a functioning,' the constant and continuous pursuit of something. Rather than just a part of the reversionistic life, it has become life.

"Every kind of impurity" means all limits have been passed, all boundaries eradicated. You are on a path of complete self-absorption.

The word for "greediness," pleonexia, refers to one who has 'become insatiable.' It's a word that essentially means- 'be implacable, unable to be satisfied.' The Greeks defined it as 'arrogant greed,' as the 'unlawful desire for what belongs to someone else.' This is that state where the believer's soul epitomizes the "broken cistern" of Jeremiah 2:13.

Pleonexia is an irresistible desire for what we have no right to possess. The OSN which has sunk this low might turn to theft, or robbery, or rape, or murder, adultery, blackmail, extortion, whatever. The point is that it willingly, and it believes in its own twisted mind rightfully, tramples the rights and freedoms and privacy of others underfoot to gratify itself, to make some personal profit, or to gain some advantage.

You have destroyed your capability to think accurately and objectively; you have destroyed your capability even to feel the way your emotions were designed to feel and to respond. By the way, once you reach this final stage there comes a point when you can no longer turn around. This is the point when God takes over and finalizes the hardening process. It happened to Pharaoh; it happened to Judas; it happens to believers, like King Saul e.g. It nearly happened to King David in the aftermath of the 'Bathsheba Fiasco.'

David describes in Psalm 38 the condition he found himself in right here. {Psalm 38} He talks about his physical weakness, his physical infirmities and illness in verses 1-7. He talks about the sickness of his soul, and about the misery of his heart and mind in verses 8-14. He was referring in the confession of those last eight verses of this Psalms to the fact that he had betrayed not only the Lord God of Israel, Jesus Christ, but himself as well. He sold himself out to the old sin nature and the cosmic system. How many of us have found ourselves in that exact same position? You know who's at fault here? Take a wild guess. No one but self!

There's only one place to go from here. 1 John 5:16: the "sin leading to death." And the 'sin unto death' is actually an act of mercy on the part of God because He knows you've

gone as far as you can possibly go. There is no more debauchery, no more degradation, no more deception you can inflict upon yourself; you're so far down that you are no longer in control.

You want to know how to stay off this path, how to steer clear of these seven steps of spiritual retreat? Guard, diligently, your own thoughts, attitude and motivation, against apathy and indifference to the Word of God. Because the very first step is when you begin to think, and then say, "I no longer need the Word. I've come this far, I've learned this much, I can make it on my own now. Thanks for the provision, Lord, but no thanks. I've got it all figured out." That's the time to be afraid, very afraid.

In the days ahead that face this nation and this generation, the Word of God is the only hope we've got. Young people, young adults, 'seasoned-citizens,' we had better learn how to hang on to this Book with every ounce of strength, endurance and tenacity we've got, because it is the only answer in a world that is becoming increasingly more confused, more self-centered and more evil every single day!

The only hope of the believer in reversionism, on these seven steps of spiritual retreat away from the plan and purpose of God, is to follow the steps of recovery found in James 4:6-10. James says,

"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' "Submit 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 miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt You."

Otherwise, as we've just seen, the end is the sin unto death. It's important, always, to remember that no believer in any dispensation who has ever died the sin unto death has lost his salvation. He has simply become as Jesus said in John 15:2, a "...branch ...that does not bear fruit," and therefore, is taken away under the maximum divine discipline.

The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 1:5-7, outlines the path of persistent growth in the plan of God which every believer of the Church Age must know by heart.