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1) Preliminary considerations.
   a) After exercising faith in Christ, the believer is instructed to grow spiritually over the course of his life (2 Peter 3:18).
   b) The fact that many believers today have absolutely no clue about this God-given requirement doesn’t negate its significance.
   c) Spiritual maturity ought to be the aim of every believer!
   d) In our dispensation, the Church Age, the path to maturity begins in the local church.
   e) It is in this setting that the believer is taught by a qualified pastor/teacher the whole counsel of God’s directive will contained in the Bible (Eph. 4:11-13, 2 Tim 3:16-17).
   f) Ideally the believer will continue to learn and apply sound doctrine over his lifespan, eventually reaching a point of spiritual maturity that is maintained until death (Phil 3:13-16, 2 Tim. 4:7-8).
   g) Again this is the ideal for believers.
   h) During this maturation process, the believer will face many challenges that will test his will and determination to adhere to Bible doctrine (Heb. 12:1-4).
   i) Instead of overcoming challenges with a mental attitude grounded in biblical truth and by applying a full arsenal of Bible doctrine, many believers are overcome by their challenges.
   j) For many this begins a reversal of the maturation process. This reversal is commonly known as retrogression, regression, or reversion.
   k) Essentially such a believer regresses or returns to an inferior spiritual condition in relation to his former level of spiritual growth.
   l) Make no mistake that the believer who is mired in the regression process faces disaster.
   m) The speed of the process ranges from insidious to fast depending on each believer.
   n) Regardless of the speed, unless corrective action is taken by the believer, the end result will be the same…spiritual ruin.
   o) The seriousness of this process is evident in the warning the writer of Hebrews gives his audience (Heb. 5:11-12, 6:4-8).
   p) Moreover, even the mature believer who is careless may slip away and spiritually regress (cf. Solomon: 1 Kings 3:7ff, 5:12, 1 Kings 11:4, Demas: Col. 4:14, Philemon 1:24 cf. 2 Tim. 4:10).
   q) This study will address the reality of retrogression; identify various indicators, causative factors, and corrective steps to be taken.

2) Various terms and phrases.
   a) The term retrogression, regression or reversion is not technically found in Scripture.
   b) However, there is a multitude of terms and phrases that demonstrate the reality of spiritual regression.
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c) Hebrew.
   ii) “those who fall away, swerve” (Psa. 101:3).
   vi) “to turn away” (פָּנַח, panah): Deut. 30:17, Hosea 7:14.

d) Greek.
   ii) “to fall”, fig in a moral, spiritual sense (πίπτω, pipto): Heb 4:11, Rev. 2:5.
   iii) “to fall, to change for the worse from a favorable condition” (ἐκπίπτω, ekpipto): Gal. 5:4, 2 Peter 3:17.
   iv) “to be carried away, led away” (συναπαγώ, sunapago): Gal. 2:13, 2 Peter 3:17.
   v) “to mislead, to wander away” (ἀποπλανάω, apoplanoa): 1 Tim. 6:10.
   vi) “to depart, to go astray by departing from moral or spiritual standards” (ἀστοχέω, astocheo): 1 Tim. 1:6, 6:21, 2 Tim. 2:18.
   vii) “to turn away” from listening to the truth (ἀποστρέφω, apostrepho): 2 Tim 4:4.
   viii) “to drift away” like a boat without anchorage (παραρρέω, pararreo): Heb 2:1.

3) What is retrogression?
   a) In a general sense, retrogression is a return to a former and less complex level of development or organization.¹
   b) In a biblical sense, it entails the reversal or regression of the maturation process (MAJG).

¹ The Merriam-Webster Reference Library, Windows 95 version 3.1.1.400, s.v. retrogression (Dallas: Zane Publishing, 1997).
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c) Before we expand upon the definition of retrogression, it is beneficial to review the essential components of Christian maturation. It is process which is dependant upon the following:
   i) Consistent FGHS (cf. Eph. 5:18, 1 John 1:9).
   ii) Knowledge of Bible Doctrine (2 Tim 3:16-17).
   iii) Application of Bible doctrine to circumstances in our niche (Col. 1:4, James 2:17, 26).
   iv) Diligence over time. Spiritual growth like physical growth doesn’t happen overnight (Eph. 4:11-16, James 1:4).

d) Regression indicates a return to an inferior spiritual condition in relation to a believer’s former level of spiritual growth.
e) Spiritual maturity is the goal but in the process of regression the believer returns to being a spiritual baby (Heb. 6:12).
f) The continued rejection and neglect of Bible doctrine in the life of the believer begins the regression process.

4) Who is susceptible to retrogression?
   a) Regression is a return to former state (e.g. spiritual infancy).
   b) By definition, an unbeliever cannot regress, since he has never advanced beyond the initial state into which he was born.
      i) All unbelievers are born captive to the sin nature (Rom. 6:17).
      ii) As such, they reside in a state of spiritual death, dominated by their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1 cf. Colossians 1:13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.).
      iii) They live their lives according to the cosmic principles that dominate this world, which is ruled by Satan (Eph. 2:2 cf. Romans 1:28-32 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them).
      iv) As such, they consistently indulge the sin nature. Indeed they are incapable of doing anything else, and reside under God’s wrath (Eph. 2:3 cf. John 3:36).
   v) Therefore, all unbelievers are born spiritually dead, controlled by their sin nature, and reject the doctrine of the gospel.
   vi) Apart from faith in Christ, that situation never changes.
c) Believers are the only ones that can regress to the former state; however this regression does not affect the reality of their ph. 1 salvation.
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i) Even in cases of extreme regression, a believer’s salvation is irrevocably intact (e.g. Saul: 1 Sam. 28:14-19).
   (1) Saul was a believer who had been appointed by God to rule over Israel (1 Sam. 9:16, 10:6-7).
   (2) At the end of his reign, Saul sought the counsel of medium regarding the Philistines. This provides evidence of how far Saul had regressed in his spiritual life.
   (3) During his consultation, Samuel made a supernatural “appearance.”
   (4) He reiterates to Saul that God had departed from him and had become his adversary. This refers to Saul’s DD in time for his disobedience (i.e. the loss of the throne for the failure to kill the Amalekites as commanded by God).
   (5) Furthermore, Samuel declares that Israel would be defeated by the Philistines.
   (6) He also adds, “Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.”
   (7) Samuel was dead so this refers to the impending death of Saul and his sons in the battle with the Philistines.
   (8) “With me” (לִימָנָיו, lim) denotes fellowship, companionship and being together in a common experience.
   (9) Where was Samuel? As every other OT believer at that point in history, Samuel was in paradise (“Abraham’s bosom,” Luke 16:22).
   (10) Hence, following their death, Saul would be in paradise with Samuel.

ii) Even in the case of the believer who is a perpetual regressor to the end of his life, the certainty of his eternal salvation is never in question (John 10:27-29, Rom. 8:38-39).

d) The reality of regression in believers, such as Saul, disproves the theological position that a believer will persevere and not depart from the faith (a.k.a. Calvinist doctrine of “perseverance of the saints”).

   i) From a grammatical point of view, why would Scripture be replete with exhortations and commands to conform to sound doctrine when, from this theological position, a believer will persevere to the end anyway?
   ii) In the last days we have a massive defection from the faith and a prevailing “lukewarm” disposition towards sound doctrine. We are after all in the midst of the Laodicean era so these negative traits should not take us by surprise (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1, Rev. 3:14ff).

   iii) Accordingly not only is it a possibility but there is a high degree of probability that a believer will not persevere in the faith over the course of his life.

   iv) Many will enter a state of retrogression from which they may never recover.

   v) If anything believers in our time in history are notorious for their lack of perseverance.
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e) Although retrogression or regression doesn’t impact one’s salvation, it does halt a believer’s spiritual growth.
f) Consequently regression will have an adverse effect upon a believer’s happiness and blessings in time and SG3.

5) Retrogression and the believer.
a) Spiritual retrogression is caused by rejection of some portion of Bible doctrine (e.g. the Exodus generation, Heb. 3:12-19).
b) Here rejection is the failure to believe and/or apply Bible doctrine.
c) In this regard the writer of Hebrews rebukes his audience (Heb. 5:11-14).
  i) He wanted to teach them more about Melchizedek but it would be hard to explain.
  ii) The difficulty didn’t reside in the explanation of the subject matter, but because of a problem with the hearers.
  iii) They had “become dull of hearing.”
  iv) The term translated “dull” (νοθρός, nothros) means lazy, slothful, or sluggish.
  v) The Hebrews had become lazy listeners in respect to the word of God.
     In other words, they were tuning out their only source of spiritual sustenance.
  vi) The verb “become” (γίνομαι, ginomai- perfect active indicative) indicates a change from being good listeners to poor listeners, but also emphasizes the seriousness of their current plight, a state of spiritual laziness.
  vii) In v. 12 the conjunction “for” (γὰρ, gar) introduces the reason for the author’s rebuke.
  viii) A sufficient amount of time had passed where they had been taught Bible doctrine and should have matured.
  ix) Yet they had regressed to a point where they again needed to be taught basic doctrines. Back to the ABC’s of doctrine! (“milk”).
  x) The believer who routinely “tunes out” the P/T and the Bible doctrine being taught ought to expect the same result.
  xi) We are to diligently pay attention to the wisdom of sound doctrine (cf. Prov. 2:2).
  xii) We ought to be humble and recognize that we absolutely need sound doctrine (Psa. 25:8-9, Prov. 8:5, 15:33, James 1:19-21).
  xiii) In contrast the mature believer takes in “solid food” or more advanced doctrine.
  xiv) Further, the mature believer is able to discern good and evil because he habitually makes applications of Bible doctrine to situations that arise in his life.
  xv) Baby believers, as some of those in the Hebrews passage, clearly don’t manifest the traits of consistent application or biblical discernment.
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(1) The believer who lacks biblical discernment will be unable to discriminate between what constitutes human viewpoint and what is in accordance with divine viewpoint.
(2) Such a believer will be swayed by OSN influence, personal prejudice, emotion or other outside factors (Eph. 4:14, Col. 2:23).
(3) No one is immune from being influenced by the OSN or external evil if we allow it so we must not let our guard down.
(4) We must be alert and discerning in these last days (Eph. 6:18, Col. 4:2, 2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Peter 5:8).

d) From this example we see that the believer in regression is one who has been exposed to sound doctrine on some level and has subsequently rejected it.
e) Those that reject the Truth and in a state of regression commonly try to rationalize their position (cf. 1 John 1:6).
f) The rejection of major biblical doctrines and principles such as separation, the necessity of the local church, the requirement of consistent assembly in Bible class, authority, et al. places the believer in immediate spiritual peril (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals.", Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near,, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another).
g) A believer cannot make a rational claim that he is progressing spiritually, when he rejects the institution, the office, and the proscribed environment that God established for spiritual growth in our dispensation, the CA (Eph. 4:11ff, 1 Tim. 3:15, cf.).
h) Moreover the persistent rejection of even one doctrine will lead to compromise in other doctrines like a debilitating contagion that spreads through the body.
i) The stiff-necked believer who routinely rejects sound doctrine and doesn’t acknowledge and confess his error resides in a state of carnality (i.e. “fleshly,” σαρκικός, sarkikos, cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4).
j) The carnal believer is out of fellowship and controlled by the OSN.

(Galatians 5:16-21 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20...
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idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, Eph 4:22, Titus 3:3).

ii) We are enjoined to abstain from indulging OSN desires (1 Peter 2:11).

j) If the carnal believer doesn’t take steps to correct his condition he will begin to spiritually regress.

k) In our study it is important to maintain distinctions in regard to carnality.

i) In a basic sense, the carnal or “fleshly” believer is one who is out of fellowship as a result of sin and therefore ruled by his “flesh” or OSN.

ii) All believers will commit personal sins over the course of their life and so will spend a varying amount of time being out of fellowship or carnal (Eccl. 7:20, Rom. 7:18-19, James 1:13-15, 3:2).

iii) Although all believers sin not all believers enter the process of retrogression.

iv) Some believers recognize their sin and address it by utilizing rebound (1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness).

v) This type of carnality may be categorized as transient carnality. In this category the believer remains out of fellowship or in a carnal state for a relatively brief period of time before rebounding.

vi) However there are other believers that commit personal sins of various types and refuse to rebound and adjust their thinking in accordance with Bible doctrine. This state is disastrous for the believer (cf. Hosea 4:6)

vii) This type of carnality may be categorized as perpetual carnality. This believer remains out of fellowship dominated by the OSN, constantly refusing to comply with sound doctrine (e.g. Solomon, the Corinthians).

viii) If this condition is not addressed via rebound and a necessary change in thinking, then this believer will begin the process of spiritual retrogression.

6) Categories of retrogression.

a) Specific categories of retrogression are as varied as there are different types of sinning.

b) In order to simplify the matter, we will examine three broad categories of retrogression: mental attitude, verbal, and overt.

c) Mental attitude retrogression.

i) Although MA sins are the least conspicuous, they form the foundation for various verbal and overt sin.

ii) The believer that fails to recognize and properly deal with MA sin runs the risk of spiritual regression.

iii) A sampling of MA sins that can lead to regression:

   (1) Unforgiving attitude (Matt. 6:15, 2 Tim. 3:3).
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(2) Jealousy (Gen. 37:1ff, Acts 7:9)
(3) Hatred (Gen. 37:4-8).
(4) Arrogance (2 Chron. 26:16).
(5) Bitterness (Acts 8:23).
(6) Sinful anger (Gen. 49:6-7).
(8) Sexual lust (Matt. 5:28).
(9) Guile/deceitful cunning (Gen. 29:25, 31:41).
(12) Rebellion (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

d) Verbal retrogression.
   i) Verbal sin or sins of the tongue is a manifestation of MA sin that has
      not been properly handled via rebound and a change of thinking.
   ii) A sampling of verbal sins that may lead to regression:
       (2) Flattery (Prov. 26:28, Rom. 16:18 cf. Psa. 5:9).
       (3) Slander/gossip (1 Cor.5:11, 1 Tim. 3:11 cf. Psa. 101:5, Prov. 10:18).
       (4) Sinful boasting (1 Cor. 5:6, Gal. 5:26, James 4:16).
       (5) Cursing/desire for revenge (Rom. 12:14, James 3:8-10).
       (6) Blasphemy/distortion of sound doctrine (1 Tim. 6:1).
       (7) Verbal disputes/dissensions (1 Tim. 2:8).
       (8) Complaining (Phil. 2:14 cf. 1 Cor. 10:10, 1 Peter 4:9).

e) Overt forms of retrogression.
   i) Overt sin like verbal sin is the result of unresolved MA sin (Mark 7:21-23).
   ii) It is the conspicuous failure of the believer that fails to rebound and
       correct his thinking.
   iii) A sampling of overt forms of retrogression:
       (1) Monetary retrogression such as cheating the government by refusing
to pay taxes, dishonest business dealings, the acquisition of wealth
by violence, stinginess, pursuing an occupation that takes one out of
Bible class, etc (Psa. 10:3, Prov. 1:10-19, 15:27, 23:4, 28:20, Luke
12:16-21).
       (2) Sexual retrogression including various illicit sexual practices such
as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, pedophilia, bestiality,
necrophilia, incest, etc (Lev. 20:11-16, 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:9, Heb 13:4,
also 1 Cor. 10:8 cf. Num. 25:1ff.).
       (3) Religious retrogression includes those who follow the traditions of
men, idolatry, legalism, cults, denominationalism, etc (Judges 2:11-13,
Mark 7:6-8, Gal. 1:6-7, 3:1-3, Col. 2:8, 16-23, 1 Tim. 4:1-3, 2
Tim. 2:16-18, 3:5-8, 4:3-4, 2 Peter 2:1).
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(4) Addiction retrogression. This form may include drug addicts (illicit and prescription), alcoholics, sex addicts, food, etc (Prov. 21:17, 23:20-21, 29-35, Luke 21:34, Rom. 13:13, Gal. 5:20-21: “sorcery”-φαρμακεία, pharmakeia indicates the use of drugs or potions in cultic rites, Eph. 5:18, 1 Peter 4:3).

(5) Criminal and anti-establishment retrogression. Examples would include murder, drug smuggling, eco-terrorism, involvement with extremist militias, etc (1 Sam. 8:3, Rom. 13:1-7, 1 Peter 4:15).

7) The general process of regression.
   a) There are certain factors that foment spiritual regression.
      i) Ignorance in regard to the propensities of the OSN and what constitutes personal sin from a biblical standpoint (Prov. 1:1-6, 32-33, 2:10-22, 5:22-23, 1 Peter 1:14, cf. Romans 8:6-7 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; Galatians 5:17-21 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God., 1 Timothy 1:8-9 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers).
      ii) The failure to consistently deal with the OSN via rebound (1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, cf. Psa. 32:1ff).
      iii) Self deception and rationalization in regard to sin (1 John 1:8, 10 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us…. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.).
      iv) Various internal and external factors can provoke a believer to react negatively to his niche and begin to reject or disregard certain principles of sound doctrine. We will label these various factors as “reactor factors.”
      v) Some of these factors include:
         (1) Loneliness, lack of fellowship - few +v friends, RM or RW has not been identified.
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(2) Monetary, job, career test - small salary, loss of employment.
(3) Impatience, frustration - with friends, spouse, etc.
(4) Conflict, dissension - with other believers in the LC.
(5) Social rejection - pressure that comes about as a result of the separation from -v, consistent attendance in Bible class, and the application of other doctrinal principles.
(6) Rebellion, failure to orient to one’s authorities.
(7) Disillusionment - the focus on the failures of others leads to doubting the credibility of Bible doctrine.
(8) Weariness, fatigue in fighting the good fight in the angelic conflict - the attitude that some applications are just too hard to make (in contrast consider Paul’s attitude, 2 Tim. 4:6-18).
(9) Loss of motivation to apply, lack of applications - a believer may fill his life with too many activities which results in too little time to apply towards the LC.
(10) The pursuit of legitimate activities or goals in an illegitimate manner - the pursuit of an education, career, or hobby that prevents a believer from regularly attending his LC under his RP.
(11) General disinterest and apathy towards Bible doctrine.
(12) The love of the world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

vi) Again, it cannot be overemphasized that regression can befall any believer regardless of his level of spiritual maturity. Even a believer who has faithfully attended an adjusted LC and has been taught the Truth for years is susceptible if he ignores various reactor factors in their life.

vii) During difficult times when these factors are present, regular attendance in Bible class is especially critical.

viii) In this environment the believer is continuously presented Divine viewpoint, challenged to overcome OSN problems with biblical solutions, receives encouragement and support from other +v believers.

ix) The wise believer will honestly appraise himself to determine if there are any reactor factors in his life. If so, then he will rebound and deal with any trouble areas according to Bible doctrine.

x) In contrast, the foolish believer will ignore these factors and will blindly forge away from the path of maturity and into the realm of spiritual regression.

b) Rather than handling problems through the application of Divine viewpoint, the regressive believer reacts under the OSN.

i) This believer abandons God’s directive will and becomes increasingly self-willed and frantic in the search for happiness.

ii) He attempts to resolve his problems by other means. That is, any means other than applying sound doctrine. Examples:
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(1) A common resolution to marital problems in the world is to divorce and replace one’s spouse with a “brand new” one.

(2) Many believers attempt to find their right mate among those who are negative to sound doctrine (Warning: You might get what you eagerly desire.).

(3) Instead of listening to and complying with righteous exhortation from their P/T, some believers respond to this pressure by leaving Bible class completely (cf. Prov. 1:7).

(4) Personal differences with fellow believers are dealt with by avoidance which may also include leaving one’s LC (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10, 12:25).

iii) Dissatisfaction and misery begin to build up with no relief. Humility and confidence in God’s provision is cast aside (cf. 1 Peter 5:6-7).

iv) In many cases the harder the wayward believer tries to manufacture his own happiness, the more it eludes him (cf. Prov. 10:28, Eccl. 2:1-11).

c) At some point the regression process, God intervenes and administers DD to the believer.

i) The believer who refuses to apply and continues to try to find fulfillment outside of God’s directive will is arrogant.

ii) For a time God may withhold punitive measures, but eventually He will act against the arrogant believer (cf. Psa. 119:21, Prov. 19:29, 26:3).

iii) The DD may take various forms. Examples include the deterioration of mental and physical health (e.g. broken bones, severe anxiety), loss of employment, misery in the home, failed business ventures, reversal in personal finances, etc.

iv) These initial stages of DD we may liken to a warning shot across the bow (i.e. warning discipline).

v) This DD is designed to steer the believer towards a spiritual recovery (Hebrews 12:11-13) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. 12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.).

vi) The smart believer gets the hint, but the foolish believer rejects this DD to his own peril.

vii) DD will continue to intensify for the foolish believer, who continues the process of regression, stubbornly refusing to rebound and alter his conduct (Rev. 2:21-22 cf. Lev. 26:14-29).

viii) God may actively work to frustrate the believer, who will find out that success cannot be achieved regardless of the effort. In other words, this believer may work like a fiend, but his desires will not be realized.
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ix) On the other hand, God may allow a believer to succeed in his evil plans (Eccl. 7:25).

x) This initial “success” may further bolster the arrogance of the believer. Even worse, this success may be erroneously perceived as proof of God favor.

d) If a believer fails to heed DD and continues on this path, his spiritual regression will become progressively worse.

i) The rebellion against God and the rejection of His DD leads to further sinning and domination by the OSN.

ii) An increase in sinning leads to increasingly more severe forms of DD.

iii) Often more severe DD has the effect of embittering the regressive believer against God and fellow believers. Of course this isn’t a rational response but it does highlight the mental and spiritual instability that is inherent in regression (cf. 1 Sam. 18:8-12, 20:33).

iv) During this time a believer may pursue associations and activities that previously had been considered repugnant (Gen. 12:12-13, 1 Sam. 28:7ff.).

e) In regard to the believer in regression, DD is not interminable. God’s discipline culminates in the SUD for the believer who steadfastly refuses to bring his thinking and manner of life into line with Divine standards (1 Chron. 10:13-14, Jer. 44:2-13, 1 Cor. 10:1-11, 1 John 5:16).

f) During the process of regression, the soul of the believer will be increasingly influenced or controlled by his emotions.

i) This is a natural consequence of the soul being ruled by the OSN as opposed to God the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:16-17 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.).

ii) The proper function of the emotions under the FGHS is interrupted.

iii) Instead the emotions are influenced by the OSN with the result that the believer becomes a slave to their emotions (Rom. 16:18: “appetites” - koilía, koilia: fig. referring to feelings or desires).

iv) For some this is manifested in mood swings and extreme emotional responses to various issues in one’s life (e.g. anger, hostility, intense fear, indifference, etc. cf. Deut. 28:20, 28, 65).

v) Over time such responses may become the norm for those in regression.

vi) The Exodus generation provides a prime example of the effects of emotional control of the soul.


2) Complaining against God and His appointed authorities (Ex. 16:2-8).

3) Lack of confidence in God’s protection (Ex. 14:10).
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(4) Living in the past (Ex. 14:12).
(5) Ingratitude (Num. 11:5-6).
(7) Living in the past (Ex. 14:12).
(8) Ingratitude (Num. 11:5-6).
(9) Emotional instability (Num. 14:1, 39-40).

g) As the regression process unfolds, the rejection of sound doctrine becomes matter of course.

i) One may observe that the regressive believer loses his zeal for Bible doctrine.

ii) Formerly the believer had a level of commitment and enthusiasm to learn and apply the Truth, but over a period of time the zeal is replaced by disinterest (cf. Heb. 10:32ff).

iii) Some believers attempt to rationalize this disinterest with various excuses (e.g. I’m busy at work, with school, etc.).

iv) The priorities in one’s life are re-arranged with the result that there is no time to attend Bible class, learn the Truth, apply under one’s spiritual gift, etc.

v) Remarkably the believer somehow finds the time to engage in a favorite hobby, spend hours at the health club, attend sporting events, or socialize with –v.

vi) In truth the study of God’s word is no longer given top billing. To the regressing believer it is a major inconvenience which is easily expendable if competing interests arise.

vii) During this process, the regressive believer commonly pulls back from associating with other adjusted, +v believers and/or the P-T.

viii) As the believer pulls back from +v, he is typically drawn toward associations with –v.

ix) Such a believer may regress to a point where he rejects the sound doctrine he once whole heartedly believed, espouses human viewpoint, and even begins to adhere to doctrines of demons.

x) Whatever knowledge of sound doctrine the believer may have accumulated becomes corrupted and is purged from the thinking (cf. Luke 8:18).

xi) In some cases a believer may end up worse off than if he had never heard the Truth (cf. 2 Peter 2:20-22).

xii) Although some believers manifest an overt antagonism toward sound doctrine and the LC, others quietly fade away out of Bible class pursue their own activities. In either case spiritual ruin is the inevitable result for those that stay this course.

8) Various adverse effects of spiritual regression.

a) The regressive believer will begin to experience a hardening of the heart as his spiritual condition deteriorates (“spiritual” arteriosclerosis!).
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i) The believer begins to harden his heart when he refuses to change his thinking and comply with doctrine (Psa. 95:8, also referred to as “stiffening the neck”, Neh. 9:29, 2 Chron. 30:8).

ii) It is a particular mindset that is oblivious to Divine viewpoint (cf. Mark 8:17, 16:14).

iii) The hardening progresses when the believer refuses to respond to warning discipline that comes upon him for OSN activity and rejection of Bible doctrine (Jer. 5:3, 23).

iv) Believers are commanded not to harden our hearts as such activity only provokes God to anger (Heb. 3:8, 15).

v) Mirroring the consequences in the physical realm, the believer who hardens his heart will face calamity especially after repeated DD (Prov. 28:14 cf. Prov. 29:1).

b) The process of hardening the heart produces scar tissue on the soul of the believer.

i) Although hardness of heart is a primary characteristic of unbelievers, it can happen to a believer when he has been deceived by the OSN (Acts 19:9 cf. Heb. 3:13).

ii) The conscience, that area of soul that enables an individual to determine what is right and wrong, begins to be adversely affected by this process (cf. Titus 1:15).

iii) Those who program their conscience with the principles of sound doctrine and conduct themselves according to these principles are said to have a good or clean conscience (1 Tim. 1:19. 3:9, 1 Peter 3:15).

iv) In contrast, those who conduct themselves in opposition to sound doctrine or a good conscience defile their conscience and produce scar tissue (Eph. 4:18-19).

1) Although v. 18 involves the unbeliever, it is a process that occurs in the life of believers.

2) Habitual sinning or hardening the heart destroys the good conscience with the result that the conscience becomes calloused.

3) “Callous” (ἀπαλγέω, apalgeo) literally means to become callous or dead to feeling. Figuratively the term refers to one who has lost sensitivity and is so accustomed to sin that he is no longer bothered by it.

v) The more one violates the conscience, the more it becomes calloused or scarred. The believer doesn’t feel the “pangs” of conscience or shame for sin (Zeph. 3:5, 1 Tim. 4:2 cf. 2 Thess. 3:14).

vi) As a consequence the believer doesn’t properly deal with his sin with rebound and a change of conduct.

vii) In part this explains how some can regress to a point where they commit various atrocities without any remorse (2 Sam. 11:6ff, 2 Chron. 28:3, 33:6).
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c) The regressive believer becomes increasingly befuddled in his apostasy.
   i) Sound doctrinal standards that were once accepted as the Truth are abandoned.
   ii) Righteous thinking, behavior, and associations become reversed. This believer will think and act in a manner that he used to rightly condemn, calling “evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20).
   iii) Such a believer frequently becomes apathetic towards the needs of the LC and former +v friends.
   iv) Some may devote their energies to devising evil schemes (Psa. 36:4, 52, Micah 2:1).

d) As the believer continues on the path of regression, he becomes increasingly vulnerable to false teaching.
   i) Due to indifference and rejection of the Bible doctrine the believer creates a spiritual vacuum or void (cf. 2 Kings 17:15).
   ii) Consequently when the believer is exposed to various cosmic philosophies and beliefs that do not agree with Divine viewpoint, he readily fills the void with darkness and deception (cf. Rom. 1:21).
   iii) The believer develops an affinity for false and demonic doctrines
       (Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 1 Timothy 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons…).
   iv) The acceptance of these false doctrines intensifies the spiritual deterioration and leads to further misery and dissatisfaction.

e) Spiritual instability leads to mental instability in believers.
   i) The believer who loses touch with the spiritual realities of sound doctrines will become mentally unbalanced to varying degrees (cf. James 1:8).
   ii) God warned the Jews that they would be punished with mental problems for disobedience (Deut. 28:13-15, 28).
   iii) Due to –v, humanity is viewed as being insane under the influence of the OSN. The +v believer protects himself through the study and application of sound doctrine (Eccl. 9:3, Rom. 12:2, Phil 4:6-7).
   iv) The insanity of the believer in regression is demonstrated by:
       (1) The Exodus generation.
       (2) Balaam (Num. 22:7, 17, 2 Peter 2:16).
       (3) Samson (Judges 16:1).
       (5) David (2 Sam. 11:2ff).
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(6) Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-9).

9) The believer in spiritual regression faces one of two outcomes.
   a) Recovery from regression.
      i) Clearly it is God’s directive will for the believer to avoid any stage of spiritual regression.
      ii) Scripture abounds with commands to avoid spiritual regression.
         (1) “Let us not sleep”: The phrase is not a command to refrain from physical sleep but to refrain from spiritual slumber or insensitivity which is a characteristic of regression (1 Thess. 5:6).
         (2) “Let us be sober”: Avoid the influence and disorientation of the OSN (1 Thess. 5:8).
         (3) “Do not be conformed to the former lusts” (1 Peter 1:14).
         (4) “Put to death the parts of the body on earth”: putting to death the parts of the body on the earth refer to maintaining control over one’s OSN (in context five OSN manifestations, Col. 3:5).
         (5) “Let us fear”: unlike the adjusted believer the regressing believer lacks reverence, respect or fear of God (Heb. 4:1).
         (6) “Let us therefore be diligent” (Heb. 4:11).
      iii) Nevertheless for those who are regressing, it is also God’s directive will to halt the process and once again resume their progress towards spiritual maturity (cf. Heb. 6:1).
      iv) Numerous passages exhort the believer to recover from regression.
         (1) Calls to return (Deut 30:2, 2 Chron. 30:9, Isa. 55:7, Lam. 3:40).
         (2) Wake up (Eph. 5:14, Rev. 3:2-3).
         (3) Repent (Rev. 2:5, 3:19).
         (4) Submit (James 4:7-10, the passage includes other commands aimed at the believer in regression).
      v) God promises mercy to those who return to Him (cf. Isa. 44:21-22, Hosea 6:1, Joel 2:12-13 cf. 2 Cor. 1:3).
      vi) Some believers go through a period regression and experience DD and then make a spiritual recovery. Examples:
         (2) David (Psa. 32:1ff, 51:1ff, Note: Although David recovered, he faced ongoing consequences because of his sinful behavior, 2 Sam. 12:10-12).
         (3) Solomon (1 Kings 11:1ff, Eccl. 12:13).
         (4) The incestuous Corinthian (1 Cor. 5:1-7, 2 Cor. 2:5-5).
         (5) Peter (Gal. 2:12, 1 Peter 1:18).
      vii) The remedy for spiritual regression.
         (1) First the believer must acknowledge his sin through rebound, and then he must cease from his particular form of regression (1 John 1:9).
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(2) A change of thinking is absolutely essential to recovery (i.e. repentance, Rev. 3:19 cf. 2 Cor. 12:21).
(3) Spiritual recovery is not attainable for those that continue to think and conduct themselves in the same manner which precipitated their regression (cf. Heb. 10:26).
(4) The believer must accept and orient to any residual DD (2 Sam. 12:10-23, 1 Kings 11:9ff, Heb. 12:3ff).
(5) This is often a painful and sorrowful process (2 Cor. 7:10, Heb. 12:11).
(6) The recovering believer ought to increase his study and application of sound doctrine (Hebrews 5:11-6:1a Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. 6:1a Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity…).
(7) This will entail reviewing and re-learning various principles of Bible doctrine.
(8) The believer should seek out associations with other adjusted believers. Do not be ashamed, afraid, guilty, etc.
(9) Other +v members of the LC are a great source of encouragement and comfort. Utilize this fantastic resource (2 Cor. 2:7-8 cf. 1 Thess. 4:17, Heb 3:13)!
(10) Maintain a consistent prayer life (Col. 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 “…pray without ceasing…”).

b) The alternative outcome is no recovery for the believer in spiritual regression.
   i) The believer that refuses to take the necessary steps to remedy his condition will never regain spiritual fitness.
   ii) Some believers may presumptuously conclude that they have plenty of time to get their act together. For these believers there is always a tomorrow.
   iii) Instead the believer ought to have a sense of urgency and begin the recovery process today (Heb. 4:7).
   iv) Besides procrastination, another pitfall for the believer is rationalization and self deception. Some believers perform an incredible “mental” gymnastic routine to convince themselves that they are not in regression (Revelation 3:16-17 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich,
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and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

v) What a pity that such mental effort is expended in the cause of evil and not toward setting one’s mind on the things above (Phil. 3:19 cf. Col. 3:2).

vi) After a period of rejection of sound doctrine, there is point where the believer becomes so entrenched in his position that it is impossible to recover (Heb. 6:4-8 cf. Hos. 5:4, Micah 2:3).

vii) The stiff necked believer who continually sows to his OSN will reap DD and ultimately death (Job 4:8, Prov. 22:8 cf. Prov. 1:22ff, 6:15, 15:10).

viii) Examples of believers who didn’t recover from retrogression.

(1) Lot (Gen. 19:30ff).
(2) Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:1ff).
(3) Phinehas and Hophni (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-34, 3:11-14, 4:4-11)
(4) Saul (1 Chron. 10:13).

10) What is the appropriate application toward believers in regression?

a) Simply the adjusted believer is to pull back and separate from them (cf. Rom. 16:17-18, Titus 3:10).

b) If the opportunity comes up, the adjusted believer should also encourage and admonish the regressive believer (2 Thess. 3:6ff. cf. Gal. 6:1-2).

c) Again the ultimate goal of separation and admonishment is to facilitate a spiritual recovery.

11) Concluding remarks.

a) Following faith in Christ, the believer us enjoined to progress to spiritual maturity (MAJG).

b) Nevertheless, a large portion of believers will fail to reach this goal.

c) Some fail shortly after believing the Gospel and regress back to their former pre-salvation condition. Others may study and apply Bible doctrine over years yet fall into spiritual regression for various reasons.

d) In either case, the believer returns to an inferior spiritual condition in relation to his former level of spiritual growth. A spiritually mature believer may regress to spiritual infancy (Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil).
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e) Spiritual regression is brought about by the continued rejection and neglect of Bible doctrine (e.g. the Exodus generation, Heb. 3:12-19).

f) The typical regression pattern entails exposure to sound doctrine in the LC, rejection of sound doctrine, and abandonment of the LC.

g) The most significant form of spiritual regression is found in those who have learned and accepted sound doctrine over a period of time and then perform an about-face and spurn it.

h) This believer is the most culpable and will experience more severe DD and loss at the Bema (Luke 12:47-48, 1 John 2:28).

i) The root cause is the negative volition of the individual which is manifested in apostasy.

j) Any believer who is careless and not on the alert may enter into this process (i.e. those who are dull of hearing or lazy listeners).

k) The careless believer is overcome by various hardships and pressures in the cosmos because he refuses to think and apply Bible doctrine (Luke 8:13-14 "And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 "And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

l) All too often this believer relies on human viewpoint and worldly philosophies which are inadequate to control the OSN and provide stability in the AC (Colossians 2:20-23 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.).

m) The regressive believer is exhorted to wake up and change their course.

n) Those who recover from their apostasy can be confident in God’s mercy.

o) In contrast the believer who doesn’t repent and recover will face progressively worse DD culminating in death.

p) If you are an adjusted believer, guard against regression by clinging to sound doctrine.

q) If you are a regressive believer, stop your lunacy, repent, rebound, and resume your spiritual maturation in the LC.