***Financial Reversionism

RV34-02***

In the letter to the church at Sardis, we have discovered a local congregation which subscribed to a sound doctrinal statement, but which had fallen into spiritual reversionism. This church had a great deal of prestige. It was viewed as a successful church organization, but it was in fact very badly spiritually disoriented from divine viewpoint concepts. This is not uncommon in our day. Some of the largest and most successful churches are religious organizations which are completely disoriented to divine viewpoint concepts and principles. They carry a great deal of prestige, and they look good to people, but that which is actually on the inside is far from the realities of the Word of God.

The service of the Sardis church members was religious activity performed in the power of the sin nature, so these were mere human good production. That was one of the things that the Lord brought in condemnation against this group of believers. They were doing things alright, but their service was out of the human flesh – out of the abilities of the sin nature. Consequently, they were in the category, I should say, of human good production. Please remember that human good production is not just something that is terribly evil. It is all of these things that are generally put under the category of compassion – being compassionate toward people. This church was shot-through with human good production. For this reason, the Lord said that their works were not perfect in His sight.

**Reversionism**

The church was warned by the Lord Jesus, therefore, to strengthen what divine viewpoint it still possessed, and to be making recovery from the reversionism into which they had fallen. That was the problem. This congregation, by and large, had fallen into spiritual reversionism. The Lord Jesus Christ warns them that He will appear suddenly, and He will impose divine discipline upon them if correction is not made.

One bright spot in the Sardis church was the presence of some members who had not followed the crowd into reversionism. The garments (which represented their spiritual condition) of most of them were besmirched with reversionism, except for these few who had resisted that kind of contamination. A few of them stood fast with their garments uncontaminated. These few were, therefore, clothed with temporal fellowship, and divine good production in their service.

**Types of Reversionism**

Reversionism is one of those tricky things in the Christian life that often will sneak up on a believer; will destroy him; and, will have very devastating effects upon him before he realizes that he has slipped into those things. Reversionism, therefore, is something that expresses itself in a variety of ways, and in a variety of situations. There are different types of reversionism and it would be helpful for us to look at some of these in order to get a little better picture as to what brought this church in Sardis down to the condition in which it found itself.

1. **Financial Reversionism**

Certainly one of the most prominent expressions of reversionism is in the realm of finances – financial reversionism. So, we'll look at that one first. Money, of course, is the medium for exchanging the fruits of one's labor. Money is what motivates us to personal effort. When we have money as the result of our efforts, we have capacity to exercise freedom in various directions. So, money is something that God has provided as a medium for us to take the fruits of our labor and to convert that effort into the things that we need and want.

However, greed for money leads to compromise of one's personal integrity. It leads to a sphere of heartlessness. It leads to a spirit of self-indulgence. It leads to personal wickedness. Greed for money is an expression of financial reversionism. We have this problem expressed in many passages in the Bible. One of those is James 5:1-6, where James says, "Come now, you rich men, weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten." What James is saying here is that here are some believers who have come into financial wealth; they have fallen into economic monetary reversionism; and, it has begun contaminating again their garments (that is, their character).

Verse 3: "Your gold and silver are rusted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. You have heaped treasure together for the last days." Here is how they have gained some of that wealth that they are trusting in for their last days. Verse 4 says, "Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cry: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." What he is saying is that part of their wealth has been gained by deceitful, dishonest means. While they have the finances, they have fallen into financial reversionism by their greed for money and their willingness to secure it in dishonest ways. "You have lived in pleasure on the earth and have been wanton. You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and killed the just; and he does not resist you." These people have even gone to the extent of being willing to take another person's life in order to advance their economic position.

In the Old Testament, the same condemnation of greed for money, as expressing financial reversionism on the part of believers, is expressed in Psalm 52:6-9: "The righteous also shall see and fear and shall laugh at him. Lo, this is the man who made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of the Lord for ever and ever. I will praise You forever because You have done it, and I will wait on Your name for it is good before your saints." Here is a man who did not put his trust for his material well-being in God, who is to care and to provide for him. Instead, he put that into some monetary base that he possessed. Therefore, instead of saying, "My life, first of all, is involved in divine good production," his life was, first of all, in providing for his monetary security.

Many believers cannot ever invest their lives in real Christian service because they just don't have time to do it. They are so preoccupied with establishing a monetary base of security for a life that is going to pass off the scene in a few short years, and then they are going to be faced with an eternity that never ends.

**Money is not the Source of Happiness**

Reversionists can be identified (and you can identify financial reversionism when it exists in yourself) by the fact that certain concepts are held by reversions that are completely wrong. One of these is that money is the source of happiness.

**Solomon**

If you'll turn to Ecclesiastes 5:10, we have this idea expressed. You must remember that this is being declared by a man who, when he entered his role as king over the nation of Israel, Solomon was asked by God, "What do you want?" And Solomon said, "I want divine viewpoint. I want to have a maximum amount of divine viewpoint in ruling this people." Well, Solomon slipped away from the divine viewpoint that God gave him. Then the book of Ecclesiastes was written as his expression of all the things that he tried to get happiness again when he lost what he had. One of the things that Solomon said in this passage (he decided) was that the thing that would make him happy was money. If he just had money, he'd be happy. Well, here are the results of that effort.

Ecclesiastes 5:10: "He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loves abundance with increase. This is also vanity (nothing). When goods increase, they are increased who eat them. What good is there to the owners thereof giving the beholding of them within their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." Solomon discovered that while he increased his goods, he also had a lot more friends to help eat up what he increased. So, he asked himself, "What am I breaking my back for, producing all this, when I have all these other people who are now using up the fruits of my labors." Furthermore, Solomon said, "The man who has less and goes out and works – he can sleep well at night. Me – I have to stay up awake, wondering who's trying to steal from me, and who's trying to create deceit." He said, "I can't even sleep well at night for worrying about how I'm going to protect all the money I have." That is a problem. People who come into possessions have the problem of how to protect those possessions.

Verse 13: "There is a great evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail. And he begets a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor which he may carry away in his hand." Here's another thing that Solomon observes. He begets a son. That son inherits all the efforts of Solomon. Then he blows it. Solomon says, "What good is that? Does that make me happy? The truth of the matter is that I can't even die and take it with me. I go out of this world with nothing, just as I came in.

Verse 16: "This also is a great evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he that has labored for the wind? All his days also, he eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and wrath with his sickness." So, worrying over his money has created another problem for him. It's giving him ulcers, and giving him physical breakdowns. So, he says, "Now what good is that? I've got the money. That didn't give me happiness. It just made me physically sick."

Verse 18: "Behold, that which I have seen. It is good and fitting for one to eat and to drink and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he takes under the sun all days of his life, which God gives him, for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and have given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion and to rejoice in his labor: this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answers him in the joy of his heart. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men. A man to whom God had given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacked nothing for his soul of all that he desired, yet God doesn't give him power to eat thereof. But a stranger eats it. This is vanity. It is an evil disease."

Here you have reflected the fact that Solomon's worry over his money and his desperate pursuit of happiness indeed gave him ulcers, so he couldn't even eat the food that he was able to buy. While he was eating all the bland foods to help his ulcer, other people were enjoying all the tamales and tortillas and all that good stuff that Solomon was able to buy, but no longer able to eat, because he had so debilitated himself physically.

There are some people that think that it's going to provide them with a status. That's part of their happiness. They say, "If I just had money, just think of all those wonderful people that I could associate with. I could then become a member of the fancy dude clubs in Dallas, and I could associate with this person and with that person." There are a lot of people who are obsessed with the idea that they have an economic status, they would have association with certain people, and therefore they would be happy. That is not true. Never forget what the upper crust (as it is called) really amounts to. The upper crust is nothing more than a bunch of crumbs held together by their own dough. That's all they amount to. When you get up there, all you are is another crumb held together with dough – zero. It will never bring you satisfaction or happiness. Solomon learned it the hard way, but he learned it by going into a reversionism, which was very dumb and very stupid for a man as smart as he was ‐ to start off so well with everything going in his favor, and then slip off into economic financial reversions.

**Ananias and Sapphira**

Some people, of course, slip into economic reversionism because they believe it will give them a certain security in life which they believe is necessary and vital for them to care for. Well, Acts 5:1-10 give us a classic example of how God judges this attempt at economic security – security not through your trust in God, but through the trust in money: "But a certain man named Ananias with Sapphira his wife sold a possession." Here is a situation existing in the early church: "And kept back part of the price, his wife also knowing of it." They were in collusion: "And brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?'" They thought that they would bring this money, and they pretended to bring all that they had sold. The Christians were sharing with one another to strengthen themselves as a little body who were increasingly coming under governmental attack. These people didn't have to bring their money, but they sold the land, and they said, "Here, we're going to give it all to the Lord."

But secretly, they held back a part of it for their own personal security. Ananias and Sapphira said, "You know, we've got to keep something for the future (for our old age). We can't just blow it all and give it all to the church. We'll pretend we're giving it all. But Peter, through the insight of the Holy Spirit, knew exactly what they were doing. So, Peter said to them, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied unto men, but unto God."

A person who goes into financial reversionism, like all reversionism, goes spiritually insane. Always equate the word reversionism with spiritual insanity. You are spiritually nuts. You're off your rocker. You're off your frame of reference. You do what is absolutely inconceivable. Peter is pointing this out to these people. He said, "This was your property. It was your property before you sold it. It was your property after you sold it. The possessions were still yours. You didn't have to give it away. You could have kept it. Why were you so insane? Why were you so irrationally off that you thought you had to play this kind of a deceitful game?"

"And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and died. And great fear came upon all of them that heard these things. The young men arose; wrapped him up; carried him out; and, buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in." Ananias doesn't come home. His wife gets worried. She says, "I've got to find out what has happened to him." So, she checks in with the group of believers: "And Peter answered her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.' And she said, 'Yea, for so much.'"

Here is Peter asking the same test question. He turns to one of the morticians, and he says, "Sam, stand by. You may have another case here in a minute. We're going to ask the test question now. We're going to give the test question about financial reversionism here." So, he asks her, "Did you give all the money?" And she says, "Oh, yes – so much."

Verse 9: "Peter said unto her, 'How is it that you've agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of them who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out.' She fell down immediately at his feet, and died. The young men came in; found her dead; carried her forth; and, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."

What Peter pointed out to her was, "You didn't lie to men." That's always the stupid part that people try to do in connection with money. They are always trying to pretend that they are lying to men. But when you, as a believer, pull a deceit relative to money, you've pulled it on the Lord. You haven't pulled it on your husband. You haven't pulled it on your wife. You haven't pulled it on some institution of society. You have pulled it on God the Holy Spirit. Fortunately for most people, God's Holy Spirit doesn't discipline with instant death as He did in this case. You can imagine what a sobering effect this had on financial reversionism within the early church. A lot of people got the message, and a lot of people found themselves able to deal with great integrity when it came to their money.

So, a big mistake that financial reversionists make is that they think it will bring them happiness, and it does not. You needn't joke around, and make all kinds of cute stories that money will bring you happiness, but you'd like to have a nice, fat fistful of misery anyhow, because it will bring you misery. Now, to be rich does not mean to be unhappy. To have money does not mean you have to be unhappy. It's only when you fall into financial reversionism that your money creates unhappiness. And it doesn't bring you security.

There is one other thing that people who are into financial reversionism always seem inevitably to make this mistake recorded in Jude 11. That is simply that you can buy anything you desire if you have money: "Woe unto them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." There is the point – "The error of Balaam for reward." We've already gone in detail previously over this incident in the Old Testament, where Balaam was called upon as a prophet to curse the people of Israel. Balak, the pagan king, wanted to bring cursing upon Israel, and he agreed to pay Balaam to do it. Balaam said, "That's what I want. Money is what I want." Balak thought that he could buy anything he wanted with money. So, Balak hired Balaam, and when Balaam tried to open his mouth to curse Israel, he ended up blessing. So, Balak (the pagan) discovered that you cannot buy anything you want just because you have money.

The problem with financial reversionism very basically is that it violates the principle that the Lord Jesus Christ laid down in Matthew 6:24 for dealing with financial possessions. This is where it's all tied together. Here is the basic ground rule. Financial reversionism is falling away from this principle: "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Therefore, I say unto you, do not be anxious for your life; what you shall eat; or, what you shall drink, nor yet for your body, which you shall put on. Is not the life more than food and the body more than raiment?"

This Scripture is not saying that it's not important that you have something to eat or that you have something to wear. What this Scripture is saying is that that is a detail of life, and it is a detail of life which you must not become obsessed with, but leave within the legitimate provision of God. That provision doesn't mean it's going to be handed to you free by somebody. It doesn't mean it's going to come floating out of heaven at the hands of angels. It means that it's going to be provided by some means of employment (some means of income) by which God will make it possible for you to eat and to have clothes to wear.

Verse 26 says, "Behold, the fowls of the year, for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? Which of you, by being anxious, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why are you anxious about raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. Yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you. Oh, you have little faith. Therefore, don't worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' Or, 'With what shall we be clothed?' For after all these things do the gentiles (that is, the unbelievers) seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you have the need of these things." And here is the punch line: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Be, therefore, not anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." A believer goes from day-to-day. You do not fall into being obsessed with finances as the main pursuit of your life.

And that's what verse 33 means: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." That is the first thing. Of course, there's a great deal more to say about this. You're going to have to get the other studies that deal with the Christian's dealing with his personal finances. We're not trying to get into that too deeply. But this whole question of making moves in life on the basis of finances is a very critical issue. The person who is in financial reversionism will always make moves in life on the basis of finances. He will not make his moves in life on the basis of his ministry, and on the basis of fulfilling the righteousness of the Kingdom of God. He will move to any place in the country for a job that gives him more money, without concerning himself one moment with whether his spiritual opportunities will be as great; whether his instruction of the Word will be as great as where he now is; or, whether his family will be denied the spiritual relationships and fellowship that they have now. They will make any move for financial gain. That is financial reversionism, and that is violating the principle here in Matthew 6.

A classic passage on financial reversionism that we'd like to turn to now is in 1 Timothy 6:3-5. It lays out the consequences of financial reversionism in a very effective way. There's one thing that, of course, always accompanies any kind of reversionism, and that is the rejection of doctrine. Reversionism is the result of going against the principles and the truth of the Word of God. In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, we read, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing but doting about questions and disputes of words of which come envy; strife; railings; evil suspicions; perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds; and, destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness. From such withdraw thyself."

**Arrogance**

What that passage is saying is that people who have deviated from sound doctrine, and people who have neglected the intake of doctrine in their souls become spiritually disoriented, and they begin then to fall into all kinds of spiritual traps, and they fall into all kinds of mental attitude sins. And one of the things that they fall into is thinking that gain is godliness. That is, "I have money. I am prospering. God favors me." Have you ever heard anybody say that or suggest that? Have you ever heard anybody suggest that they have money because God knows whom to trust His money to? Oh, I've heard that arrogance more than once – people who have money saying, "God knows whom to trust His money to" meaning, "I am a very godly man. I have money. That shows that God is trusting me with His money because I know what to do with God's money. And so I'm a very wonderful person." Paul says, "You're in financial reversions if you think that." Having money is not an indication that you are a godly person."

The lack of sound Bible doctrine in the soul results in that kind of arrogance. That's what we're dealing with. We're dealing with arrogance. Arrogance is a fundamental problem in the Christian life. It is the problem that we have to fight against all the time. If there's any one word that summarizes the issues and the threat to the Christian life, it's the word "arrogance." Arrogance is at the core of what is expressed in all kinds of ways in our dealings with one another, and in our dealings with the Lord. Arrogance is expressed in the sins of pride; in the spirit of contention; in the spirit of envy; in strife; in slandering; and, in expressions of suspicions. All of those are the result of arrogance. To equate financial prosperity with being in the favor of God is the ultimate expression of arrogance.

**Godliness**

What is godliness in? Godliness is in Bible doctrine in the mind applied by the Holy Spirit. That is what is gain. That is what is real wealth. The spirit of godliness is knowing doctrine and permitting the Spirit of God to apply it in your life. That makes you a rich person.

Motivation for those in financial reversionism is not the glory of God, but personal power through their money. Don't forget that 1 Timothy 6 tells us that, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." That is what is important: being filled with doctrine; being filled with the Holy Spirit; and, thereby being content with the material possessions that God gives you to execute your life of ministry. Now that is real wealth. This is real spiritual wealth, and it is the source of happiness and capacity for living.

He reminds us in verse 7 that we take nothing into heaven: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out." I must qualify that by reminding you that this passage is talking about material things. You didn't bring anything material into the world, and you're not going to take anything material out of the world. But you are going to take something out of this world that you did not bring in. You are going to take a capacity to enjoy eternity out with you. Everyone in eternity will not have the same capacity for enjoying heaven. There are going to be a lot of poverty people in heaven. The capacity has to be built this side of death. It is only here that you build the capacity to enjoy heaven, and that you build the capacity to be able to receive the grace of God. You enjoy that capacity now. That's what super grace means. It means developing a container (a capacity) to receive God's blessing to the degree of super abundant blessing. You have to develop that through the intake of the Word of God and your positive response to the Word of God. You won't take your money with you, but you will sure take the spiritual prosperity that your money can gain for you if your money is used in the right way. That's what's so serious about financial reversionism. You can use it to develop the capacity to enjoy eternity, or you can use it to destroy your capacity to enjoy eternity.

So the principle is reiterated again in verse 8: "Having food and raiment, let us be there with content." That means having the basics in life – be content with that. Do not set your heart upon being rich. That does not mean that you should not seek to have a better car or a better house or better clothes to improve your circumstances. But it's saying to keep those in an incidental way, because super grace brings prosperity materially. It brings prosperity in many areas of life. What this passage is saying is that you've got the basics. Be satisfied with that.

I could not possibly tell you, as some cutesy-poo preachers like to tell their congregations, that if you don't give that money to the Lord, and if you don't give at least 10%, He's going to cause somebody to run into your new car and put a dent in the fender. He's going to take it out of you because the person who is going to run into you is going to be an uninsured motorist. God is going to see to it, and you are going to have to pay for fixing your own car. How do you like them bananas? Well, some congregation just sat there and begin shaking, and they just can't wait to get to the offering plate after that, and they have been robbed of eternal blessings because that kind of money does not bring God's reward either. It's given on the wrong bases and in the wrong way.

So, that's not what we're saying. But there are basics that God provides. Be stabilized and be satisfied with what the Lord gives you. Just because someone else has something more, don't let that be the motivation for you to say, "I have to get out and get another job so I can have that too. Don't go putting your family to work just so you can earn something more that equates you with what other people have in their homes and in their possessions. Be content with what God has provided, and keep your eyes on one thing: exercising your spiritual gift to produce divine good works, and to expand your capacity to enjoy heaven and the rewards that God will give you there for that service. That's the thing. So, real wealth is godliness with freedom from obsession over money.

Financial reversionism produces many illegitimate desires which will be frantically pursued even by ungodly means. This is one of the signs that you are in financial reversionism. You will be greedy for money, and you will go after it, even in illegitimate ways. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, therefore, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." Our television is constantly seeking to establish false priorities of material things that we should pursue, and we lose our balance between the temporal and the eternal. We fall into all kinds of self-induced misery because we are pursuing things that we have been told are important for us to have. We bring on depressions; we attract divine discipline; and, we attract death to ourselves.

Material gain and power which is secured while in reversionism do not glorify God, but, in fact, they waste your life. That's what verse 9 means – that people who are determined to be rich will fall into temptations of acting in an evil way. They'll fall into snares. They'll fall into foolish and hurtful lusts, and they will destroy themselves in a variety of ways.

Verse 10 is that famous verse that tells us then that, "The lust for money is the root of reversionism." 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.' It is the love of money which is the root cause of reversionism – of all kinds of reversionism, and certainly of financial reversionism. The reason we are emphasizing this one is because from financial reversionism, all other kinds flow very readily. Here the statement is made in 1 Timothy 6:10 that that's where the anchor point is. But the current practice in our society is to so lust for material things that it corrupts us spiritually and it leads us into corrupt practices. So, you push yourself through with divine discipline because of monetary lusts.

Verse 11 says that the super grace believer must, by all means, avoid falling into financial reversionism: "But you, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness."

We do have Christians who are financially well off. So Paul does not want to stop this line of discussion here before giving a warning to those who are financially well off. In 1 Timothy 6:17, he says, "Charge them that are rich in this age, that they be not high-minded (arrogance again) and trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy." Do not be arrogant with your wealth. When you are arrogant because you have money, you become a brutal person. Do not seek security in money instead of finding that security in God. Remember that you might lose your capacity to make money, let alone to lose your money. But if your provision is from God, you will never lose that.

Furthermore, verse 17 says, "Do not forget that God alone is the source of all satisfaction and blessing." Maintain the distinction between temporal and eternal values. Remember that your final destiny is heaven – not earth. So, what you are going to enjoy is what is up there – not what is here. The Word of God (doctrine stored in the soul) and positive volitional use of it preserves a Christian from financial reversionism. The real poverty and the real bankruptcy that a Christian has to face is a lack of doctrine in his human spirit. Poor people sometimes are tempted to envy those who are financially well-off, and that is a step in the direction in itself of reversionism.

So, the point here is, in short, never compromise your occupation with Christ for some immediate material benefit. Financial reversionism is one of the great, terrible destructive effects upon our society.

1. **Verbal Reversionism**

Another kind of reversionism is verbal reversionism. Here is one that is almost second only among Christians to the reversionism that exists in terms of money. Financial reversionism very readily leads to verbal reversionism. Remember that your speech expresses your mental attitudes. Mental attitude sin includes such things as hatred, bitterness, envy, pride, jealousy, vindictiveness, and self-pity. Those are all mental attitudes. But these mental attitude sins are expressed verbally as gossip; slander; judging motives of another person; telling lies; and, belittling. From God's frame of reference, these are very important issues. It is a very grievous thing when you gossip. It is a very serious matter when you slander a person, or misrepresent something or somebody. It is a very serious matter when you try judging another person's motives; when you lie about a person; or, when you belittle a person. All of these mental and verbal sins are exercised by your deliberate choice. They are not things that are forced upon you. So, they reveal a condition of spiritual reversion.

This verbal reversionism is usually covered over with a pretense of Christian sweetness and sincerity. Yet, it is one of the most loathsome things within a Christian community. Verbal reversionism is always sweetness; always sincerity; and, always reassurances that you don't mean to do any harm. You don't mean to gossip, nut then you go and gossip: "I don't want to say something bad about a person, but," and then you say all kinds of bad things about him. "I don't mean to slander a person, but boy, let me tell you this," and then you slander him.

Well the Bible forbids verbal reversionism. In James 4:11 is one such statement: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge." Only God can judge his own laws. Only God can judge another person's performance according to the laws in the Word of God.

In the Old Testament, this same principle was laid out in Psalm 52:1-5: "Why do you boast yourself in mischief, O, mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises mischief like a sharp razor working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, and lying rather than to speak righteousness. You love all devouring words, O your deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy you forever. He shall take you away and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and root you out of the land of the living." The Bible says, "Don't fall into verbal reversionism."

Human speech is, of course, the instrument of verbal reversionism. For that reason, James 3:5-10 have that classic passage about the evil quality inherent in the tongue: "Even so, the tongue is a little member. It boasts great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles. The tongue is a fire: a world of iniquity. So is the tongue among our members, that defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beast and of birds and of serpents and of things in the sea is tamed, and has been tamed by mankind. But the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. Therewith we bless God, even the Father; and, therewith we curse men, who are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things are not so to be."

**Swear Words**

When the tongue is used to curse (and curse means swear words), it is the same tongue with which you stood up and gave a testimony concerning the grace of God in your life. James says, "That's incompatible. That should not be." And you would not be doing that unless you are in verbal reversionism. When you speak about your "hells" and "damns" and your obscenities, and right down the line of one kind or another, you are relating yourself to a power base of authority, which is that of Satan. Don't you kid yourself that those little expletives are innocent words and that they don't mean anything. They mean a lot. They are saying that on the authority of Satan, you are making this declaration.

However, if your power authority is God, then the Scripture says you'll say, "Yea, yea, and nay, nay." And your words will be straightforward, and your words will be viewed as the words of a person of integrity. They will be believed, and they will be trusted. You will not have to call upon the power base of Satan to impress people that you really are to be taken seriously, or that your words are true words. It is a serious matter to have the tongue that praises God also to be contaminated by the foulness of cursing and obscenities. That is verbal reversionism. There are Christians who don't seem to understand that. That's what they are falling into. The believers in the Word of God consider people who are in verbal reversion as very dangerous people. When you spot a fellow Christian who signals to you verbal reversionism, the Bible says, "Backpedal as fast as you can."

Romans 16:17-18: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own body, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent." What the Bible says here is that you, as a believer, should be smart enough and mature enough not to be a sucker for sweetness and light words (by fair words and fair speeches) and to be trapped into believing that these people are not all that bad with their verbal reversionism. They are that bad. And you would do well to believe the Word of God, and to have nothing to do with them.

One of the great classic passages of verbal reversionism in action is found in James 5:9-20. That is a loaded passage of Scripture that we will not have time to go into now, but we'll pick it up there next time – the expression of verbal reversionism in all of its loathsome and ugly forms.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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