

The Seven Stages of Compromise in Personal Relationships

God has set a very simple principle in this life for His children: separate from evil. God warns us over and over in the Word regarding the seductive nature of sin, regarding the strength of temptation. God knows that our sinful nature is pre-disposed to sin, and we require not to always stand and fight temptation, but to flee it. We are to avoid all appearance of evil, give no occasion to the flesh and flee youthful lusts. “Let Him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”, says 1 Corinthians 10:12. All this adds up to God trying to protect His children from the terribly infectious nature of sin. In I Corinthians 5, Paul says, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”, a little yeast spreads through the whole dough to infect and affect everything.

Now, knowing the pervasive effects of sin, God instructs us similarly with regard to close relationships with the unbelievers. He knows we are social creatures. We were made to fellowship, to share our lives with Him and each other. He knows that the company we keep will effectively decide a huge part of our spiritual lives. He thus has very specific commands with regards relating to unbelievers. Psalm 1 tells us that the man who does not walk, stand or sit with the ungodly will be blessed. God is teaching separation. In the New Testament, we find God’s instruction repeated in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. God says, don’t be unequally yoked. That’s a farming illustration. You wouldn’t put a goat and a cow together to plow; they are totally unlike in nature. Paul is saying, “You are so unlike in nature, that a close, binding relationship between you two is unworkable”. He then goes on to underline this by asking how two things that are opposite in nature can work together. Finally, he comforts by reminding us of the close fellowship God promises for those who separate from unbelievers.

What is this separation? Seclusion? Isolation? No, Paul explains in I Corinthians 5:10 that this is impossible. Rather, separation is a limiting of fellowship and intimacy. It is not hate, or even loving them less, after all, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, and treat them as we would want to be treated. But separation from unbelievers involves limiting the amount of time we might spend with them, or limiting the contexts in which we will meet, when it’s in our power to do so. Basically, it’s guarding your heart. Unbelievers are not yet in Christ, with His Spirit to guide them, and thus we cannot allow them into a deep and intimate place in our hearts. We may love them, reach out to them, but we cannot allow them into what you might call your inner circle of trusted friends and loved ones. To do so is to invite an influence into your heart that is incapable of building you up spiritually and even giving you God’s perspective on issues.

Now, it has been my sad experience to watch not a few good professing Christians disobey this command and enter into a close relationship with an unbeliever. I can tell you that thus far, 100% of the time, the professing believer has backslidden and sometimes even renounced the faith. It has been a heartbreak for me to see ones close to me, and ones I was responsible for shepherding in a way, to choose to forego separation and to give their heart to an unbeliever. Obviously, we are talking here particularly about relationships of the romantic type. As I have seen especially young Christians take this path, it seems each time the same progression takes place. I call it the Seven Stages of Compromise in Personal Relationships. Perhaps you’ve seen it in someone too. Perhaps you know someone who is going down that road. Perhaps you

find yourself slipping down that road. I trust that these stages will be recognizable, and the advice Biblical for turning back and doing it God's way.

Stage 1 : We're just friends!

This is the first sign of trouble. A parent, close friend, relative, or spiritual leader notices the bond forming between the Christian and an unbeliever of the opposite sex. When questioned, the response is, "We're just friends!" Now I always thought to myself, that it is the use of the word 'just' that worries me. Why, "just" friends? Too often it seems to me that the word 'just' is said with a shy smile, with a quick blush, as if there is a possibility that the 'just' may drop off and lead into something else. 'Just friends' is frankly how most relationships start. 'Just friends' relationships can change into something else in one conversation. To say, 'We're just friends' doesn't really answer the question. The question is, "Are you developing a bond with this person?" 'We're just friends' is dodging that question. What such a Christian needs to understand is that romantic relationships begin on the basis of friendship, and the fact that there might not be any romantic interest right now doesn't mean there won't be later.

And, let's be frank. All of us feel that desire to be liked, admired or thought of romantically by another. It is a wonderful feeling. Don't fool yourself into thinking that if you were to find out that the unbelieving 'friend' liked you romantically that it would not affect you in any way. The key is 'guard your heart'. Set that distance between your heart and the affections of an unbeliever, no matter how nice, or moral or good looking he or she may be. Understand that God wants the best for you, and marrying an unbeliever is not His best! You need to set a distance between you and the friend such that a romantic proposal will not even be in either of your minds. If an unbeliever even thinks you would agree to such a proposal, then you have not practiced biblical separation.

Stage 2: "I Can Win Him/Her to the Lord"

Here is where the trouble begins. The person is no longer denying that there is a romantic bond, he is now simply finding a way to legitimize it. He is saying, "Yes, we have a relationship. I plan to continue with it. I do acknowledge that to be unequally yoked is wrong. So I will solve that problem by getting them saved." Now firstly, who authorized you to declare that another will get saved? You don't know that. God decides those things, and it is only His Spirit that can win someone to the Lord. Our best efforts are still not what win anyone to Christ; it is God. And to say you *will* win someone to God is to speak for God! "But I know of someone who won their partner to God!" Yes, it happens, that's God's business, and we are to just obey what He's told us to do. You don't disobey God's command to separate, and then in the middle of your disobedience, say, "Well, God, now you save him or her". No, that is not how it works.

Really, this is a lie. A person who says this is not deeply concerned about this person's spiritual state. If they were, they would have evangelised them a long time ago and then kept the appropriate distance to allow them to make the most crucial decision of their lives. No, a person like this is hiding behind evangelism to mask their desire for the relationship. They are not interested in that person's soul, but in his or her love. They now want the relationship at all costs.

But, here's the problem that such a person doesn't see. He or she is in the process of falling in love with an unsaved, unredeemed human being. Now, suppose that person does get saved. Are you hoping that the relationship will now be business as usual, just now under the nice, comfortable, 'saved' category? Do you think that all salvation will accomplish is to allow your relationship to be accepted by others? How selfish of you. That person's salvation, if genuine, will bring about profound change in his or her life. In fact, it may so alter the person as to make him or her completely different. So different as to be perhaps different to the person you fell in love with. Now, will you still want the person? Or have you set your heart on what he or she is as an unsaved guy or girl? Furthermore, if he or she got saved, what he or she would need more than anything else would be to be untangled from human intimate relationships, so that he or she can figure out their walk with God. The person just has a new relationship with Jesus. How hard it is for him or her to try and now balance their new relationship with the responsibility of a romantic relationship with another! No, the person needs time, distance, space to work it out, to grow. Any believer truly controlled by God will give new believers of the opposite sex a good period of time to grow and stabilize in the faith before even considering any relationship of a deeper kind.

The Christian wanting the relationship always says that he or she will win them to the Lord, but he or she never seems to realize that the chances are the unbeliever will win them back into the world. That's because by compromising, you are on their territory, they have the upper hand, you don't.

I can win them to the Lord is a lie, both because that's not the ultimate motive, and because you don't know if that will happen. If you really love them, then give them the gospel, show them the kind of love you give to someone you hope will be saved, and leave it there. Step back, and let God do the rest. If it is in His will for you two to be together, He will move heaven and earth to get you two together, don't you try and do His work for Him. Obey Him, and then trust Him.

Stage 3: I'm in too deep

Now the compromise deepens. Here the person says, we've gotten so close. We have such a bond that it's too late to break up now. We've crossed the line. We've reached a point of no return. Our bond is too strong. To break up now will shatter him/her. They will be devastated if I break up.

Once again there is self-deception at work here. It is true that relationships get deeper as they progress. It is also true that ending a relationship hurts. But let me ask, does our disobedience authorize us to disobey further? Can I break God's commands by building up an intimate relationship with an unbeliever and then turn around and say, the intimacy of our relationship allows us to continue in it. Like Saul 1 Samuel 15, he felt his disobedience was justified because of the situation. You cannot use the effects of sin as an excuse to continue in sin.

It's true that romantic relationships cause a deep and intimate bond to be built up. This is further complicated if you get involved in physical love before marriage. God has designed both the human heart and sex to have such a binding effect on the heart. But we must accept when we have allowed the design of our heart to fall into a place it was never meant to be. We must be mature enough to acknowledge that this bond is illegitimate in God's eyes, wrong, and unhealthy. And we must, relying on God's Spirit have the courage to break it off and separate. It's like when you had to pull off

an old plaster that was really stuck. Was it better to excruciatingly peel it off micro millimeter by micro millimeter, or to give it a sudden and firm tug? Better the sharp and acute pain of a breakup now, than the ongoing, chronic misery of a ruined marriage or a divorce. Don't pretend you are so worried about the other person's heart. If you were truly worried about them, again, you'd care for their soul, evangelise them and step back.

Stage 4: "You just don't understand"

By now, we have told the compromising Christian just about everything he needs to hear on compromise. He knows it is out of God's will. He knows he can't win them to God. He knows none of his excuses are Biblical or correct. Now he resorts to his final defense- 'you don't understand'. By this, such Christians mean their situation is so unique, their relationship is so unlike any other that has gone before it, that no one but themselves are authorized to understand or judge it. Everyone else is ignorant, and uninformed. Parents are merely 'old-fashioned'. Church leaders are merely 'legalistic'. But ultimately, this is a self-deception again. What leads you to think this is because of the fact of your intimacy with the other person, you feel that they have opened up to you in a way which no one else has. You feel privileged and honoured, and in a sense, in a special place to influence and help them. As a result, people telling you God's commands just don't know what's in your heart or in the other person's. But here's the thing. God's laws are His laws. You might hate gravity. You might say, 'gravity, you just don't understand my desire to fly. You just don't understand that I am light on my feet!' But ultimately, gravity affects all of us the same way. Same with God's spiritual laws. You can argue with them, feel that you are the exception, but if God believed that, he would have written your exceptional situation into the Word as the exception. Yes, you know more than others do about the person you're in love with, you know your own heart better too, but there is one who knows your heart even better than you do, and the heart of the other person better than you do, God. He said 'be not unequally yoked. Doing it God's way works 100% of the time. Doing it your own way, ultimately fails 100% of the time. You say, "You don't understand, I must continue in this relationship for xyz reasons. But God says, 'No you don't understand, you must discontinue for the many reasons I have laid down in my Word'.

Stage 5: Anger, "I'm leaving".

Now compromise has deepened into that ugly state, rebellion. Once people hold compromising Christians accountable and do so continually, the response will either be repentance or rebellion. It is sad that when the heart hardens, that it then reacts in anger. Once you believe that you are justified in your compromise, that others just don't understand, that these are outsiders criticizing what they do not know, then you react in anger. "Why don't they just leave us alone? What did we ever do to them?" Friend, if people are telling you that an intimate relationship with an unbeliever will destroy you, then they are telling you the truth, and more than likely they love you enough to tell you that. James 1:20 "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Selfish anger does not leave you open to be led and controlled by God the Spirit in His Word. Rather, it clouds your vision and pollutes your thoughts with bitterness and unforgiveness. Here's the sad part. The harder a heart gets, the more it becomes set in its ways. All of us chafe at some point under God's

Word, all of us get angry at conviction sometime; but when you say, “That’s it! I’ve heard enough! I’m out of here!” you are in a bad place. You are in a state of rebellion and leaving for the wrong reasons. I know that you can have parental authority that can be abusive. I know you can have pastors and church leaders who can be twisted and even evil, but those are things that will be noticed by other Spirit-filled Christians, and you will know what action to take Biblically in that situation. But most often, I have seen compromising Christians using faults in their leaders as supposed reasons to leave, when in fact even other Christians not in leadership have confronted them about their sin.

I’m not trying to teach some kind of cultic ‘no-one-leaves’ mentality. When it’s time to go from one place, you go, and God will lead you. But when you run away from a problem with sin in your heart, you are stepping out from the accountability that God placed you under in that family or that church. Do your very best to sort things out, to humble yourself, try your best to reconcile. God uses human authority and accountability in our lives, and to spurn it is dangerous. Heb 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.” When you run out in anger, you may very well be stepping out from under God’s umbrella of protection. The worst place on earth for a human being to be is when God says to that human ‘Then do it your way’. When God gives you up to your own lusts, He has just signed your death warrant, for there is more than enough sin inside you and me to destroy us very quickly.

Stage 6: The Calm Before the Storm

The next stage that one always encounters is what I call *the calm before the storm*. The girl moves in with the boy, or the person leaves church to follow after this relationship against all pleas and godly advice. They pursue the relationship as they were doing, only deeper. And now, all seems well. They are happy. They seem to have that huge burden off their shoulders. They are ‘free’ and happy. Even those who counseled them seem puzzled, everything does seem to be going so well for them, even financially, there seems to be a blessing on their disobedience. It is as if they can look on the people that counseled them and say, “See! I told you so!” I have seen this with literally every single believer I know who has gone this way, a period of almost greater joy than they ever had. They can pursue their love without conviction, and they seem happy and content.

This is the calm before the storm. It is an illusion. I can’t say why it always happens like this, but I have a theory, take it for what it’s worth. When a person leaves the accountability of home and church in anger without heeding any godly counsel, I believe he or she is stepping out of God’s protective care. That is not to say He is uninvolved or has abandoned the person, but He does not force Himself onto anyone. Thus when Paul spoke of church disciplining the man in I Corinthians 5:5, he used the words, “deliver unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh”. Now this verse has been awfully abused. What I think Paul was saying, and it harmonises with the context, is that when the individual would be put out of the church, he would be essentially outside of God’s hedge. Satan spoke about this hedge in Job 1:10. Satan cannot get at a believer behind God’s hedge, without God’s permission. But once outside that hedge, he is at the mercy of Satan; Satan would probably begin to ruin him and he would hopefully repent and return to God. Now the person who leaves a good Bible-

believing local church in anger or a child who leaves a home in rebellion, is all too often stepping out of the hedge into Satan's domain.

What does this have to do with the calm before the storm?

Well, Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. When someone steps into his domain, I don't believe he is going to immediately scare you right back into God's domain. More than likely, as a crafty deceiver, he will entice further, draw you into the web of your own sin, continually causing your conscience to sear, and your heart to become confirmed in rebellion. Please understand, Satan can bless too. Satan, according to Luke 4:6, owns the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof and he can give it and share it with whomever he wants. He can bless you and make you think you are on the right track even when your behaviour is condemned by Scripture. Job promotions, salary increases, avenues opening up, it all seems to mean that God is allowing it. No, God isn't. When you turn your back in anger on all godly counsel, then you have told God what you think of His laws and His involvement in your life. This blessing is not from Him, I can assure you. In Revelation 3:17 the church thought its blessing was great, but they were blind to their true condition.

Stage 7: Reaping What You Sowed.

This is the final stage. I'm sure if I asked one of the farmers of our land if it were possible to reap apples if I planted orange seeds that he would consider city-people to be ignorant beyond his wildest dreams! If you plant apples, expect apples, not bananas or watermelons. What you sow, you reap. Galatians 6:7-8: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

If you sow in fleshliness, immoral, disobedient living, your harvest will be one corruption. If you sow obedience, Spirit-filled living, the harvest will be life everlasting, a good, useful life here, and a rewarded one eternally. This is a law, as sure as the law of gravity. What goes up must come down, no exceptions. What sows disobedience, will reap destruction, no exceptions. I have seen people exist in the stage 6, the calm before the storm for literally years, but eventually the harvest does come. Eventually the pain of flaunting God's laws arrives. The unwanted pregnancy, the affairs, the unfaithfulness, the miserable marriage, the divorce, the custody battles, a lifelong harvest of regret and pain. How much of it can be avoided by sowing to the Spirit. See, all sowing takes faith. A farmer sows seeds, not seeing his harvest right in front of him, but believing, having faith, that those seeds will follow the natural laws of germination and bring forth a harvest in keeping with what he is planting. So with us. We sow obedience, not always seeing the end result in front of us, but believing, or having faith that keeping God's laws result in happiness, usefulness and fruitfulness.

Friend, how much pain we can avoid if we do it God's way. The Seven Stages of Compromise in a believer's life are a pain to behold. If you're on this road, please turn back. If you know someone who is, love them enough to speak the truth to them in love, and help them. Living life God's way works 100% of the time. Living life our way, in our wisdom fails 100% of the time. Proverbs 3:5-7: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil."