

Keep Moving Forward – January 21, 2018

As we've taken a lengthy holiday from Hebrews let's take a moment to review the letter's circumstances before we step from ch5 into ch6. While we have no idea who wrote the letter, the text feels as if the author knew the congregation very well and cared for them greatly.

The Hebrew content leads us to believe the letter was written to a **congregation of Jewish Christians**. From the letter we can tell these Jewish followers of Jesus heard about Him from the apostles [2:3]. The message about Him was confirmed with signs of God's power and gifts of the Holy Spirit [2:4]. Their conviction in their new faith led them to suffer insults and persecution and stood by others treated similarly [6:10 & 10:32-34]. In an earlier persecution some leaders might have died [13:7? After Nero's great Fire 64?] but this congregation had not yet "resisted to the point of shedding blood" [12:4]. *So this letter was likely written to a gathering of Jewish Christians in Rome in the late 60s of the first Century.*

And the problem is they are feeling pressure, some persecution - likely from Roman authorities and Jewish neighbors- that is making them consider leaving Jesus behind and retreating back into less controversial Judaism. They must guard against "drifting away" [2:1]. They must hold to their confidence and hope [3:6]. They must reject a "sinful, unbelieving heart" [3:12]. They must guard against falling short of God's Rest [4:1]. They must "hold firmly to the faith [they] profess" [4:14]

Remember, despite the rhetorical style of this letter it wasn't written to be a theology textbook. Our author is worried the people will leave Jesus and is writing to save them from that grave mistake.

Now, as we come to the end of ch5 the idea of Jesus, the Son of God being a "High Priest" has already been floated in **2: 17** For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, **3:1**... fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. And **4:14-15** where Jesus is OUR "great high priest who has ascended to Heaven"

Then in ch5 our author quotes Psalm 110:4 revealing that God called Jesus to be High Priest saying: **6** ... "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. And then states explicitly that upon completing his work Jesus **10**... was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. [Melchize-who?]

Then comes a part that hints that the author knew these people really well, first because of the very personal assessment of their spiritual status and also because of the incredibly direct language: "I would really like to enlighten you with this incredible new insight I've got on Melchizedek and Jesus *but you're about as quick as a sloth on valium* You're two candles short of a menorah- and only half as bright. You're spiritual infants crying for your baby bottle. I've got Truth for you but "You can't handle the Truth."

And so as we step from that paragraph to the next [from ch5 to 6] we might expect a response like Paul's to the Corinthians [1Cor 3:2]: Milk's all you can handle so milk's what you're going to get. Or maybe we might expect a word like "Nevertheless..." I realize you can't handle it, "nevertheless" we're gonna forge ahead.

But he doesn't say that. Our author says: **"Therefore."** F.F. Bruce sums it up nicely: "They have remained immature too long; *therefore* [our author] will give them something calculated to take them out of their immaturity." Their minds require a good stretching and this "Melchizedek stuff" will surely do it.

But before he takes up his maturity-stimulating comparison of Melchizedek and Jesus, our author underscores the fact that for everyone who makes the choice to be a disciple of Jesus there's no "treading water," no squatting, no loitering or hanging about, no dallying or dawdling. Every follower of Jesus MUST **"Keep moving forward."**

And if you do not **keep moving forward** in your faith in Christ there is the real danger of **falling away**. And that's what Heb 6:1-8 are all about- the ongoing need for Jesus' people to **"keep moving forward."**

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6:1 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity. The congregation to whom this is written ARE NOT new converts. They've been following Jesus for some years now and they have the spiritual scars and bruises to prove it [10:32ff]. But they've **self-arrested their forward movement**. They "no longer try to understand" They want someone to spoon-feed them "the elementary truths of God's word all over again." Instead of moving "further up and further in" they've set up camp on the basics of the faith, the rudiments, the ABC's. [Anna do you know your ABCs. Can you sing the song for us- everyone help her- HS class/Running Start online]

Now if you learn the ABC's and you can sing the song and everything- that's good for you. But if you walk into your college classroom and expect to sing the ABC's rather than dissect the poetry of Dante or Homer or read the history of Europe you will be sadly disappointed when grade time comes along. Not to mention a bit embarrassed.

The rudiments of any skill or understanding [playing the guitar or speaking a foreign language, the ABC's] are critical and are always in play however far along your studies go- but their importance means they shift to the background, becoming the foundation while newer skills and fresher information, new experiences of the faith rise to the forefront- all guided by the rudiments.

Notice the language in v1 let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity. **The responsibility to move forward is placed with us.** We decide whether we will move forward or not. But once we concur we are "taken forward to maturity" in Christ by the power of God. Remember our time in Philipians: **Phil. 2:12** So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; **13** for **it is God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. We must "keep moving forward."

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1...**not laying again the foundation** of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about cleansing rites the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 **And God permitting, we will do so.**

We need the elementary teachings about Christ. That's a "given." We cannot be His disciples without a **foundation** of repentance, faith in God, baptism and ministry and resurrection and judgment [note: all have Jewish foundation.] **But we cannot camp there either.** Foundations are important but they're only the beginning and God wants us to move forward into maturity. [I find it interesting that even in this short list of foundation stones there is forward movement: repentance, faith, baptism, ministry, resurrection, judgment.]

When the kids were home and in school and we were helping them write a paper the one thing they hated to hear was: **"That's a good start."** It's a joke now. [Our youngest, Ransom, is applying to zoos and aquariums all over the country- when he has us look over his resume's we always respond with "That's a good start." It's traditional.] Of course the kids hated to hear it while in school because **they didn't want to progress**, they wanted to be done. We wanted them to keep moving forward. They wanted to be done in one swipe. *They wanted their foundation to be their finished product!*

In trying to get people to understand the full cost of choosing to follow him- Jesus said:

Luke 14:28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? **29** For if he **lays the foundation** and is not able to finish it, **everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30** saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

Jesus also said in another part of Luke: **Luke 9:62** ...

'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

When you're plowing up a field, you can't look back to admire your work. You have to **keep moving forward and keep looking forward.** When you set the foundation you can't stop to admire your work. The building must rise up. So plan well, count the cost and keep moving forward

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4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age **6** and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.

Here we move into a very serious statement and warning about the danger of stagnating in Christ. *But before we get to that I want you to see that even in the formation of the warning there is a picture of progress in faith.*

A frame by frame forward movement to faith in Christ.

It begins with enlightenment- being **"enlightened."** The light has come on in spirit, mind & heart, giving you a spiritual "Ah HA!" Experience about the truth of God and Christ. You were in the dark stumbling about and then suddenly there was light and the path to Jesus was clear.

Then you “**tasted the heavenly gift,**” that is, you became aware that you were experiencing new creation inside you, a new life, a new love, coming from outside yourself and you realize it has the fingerprints of God all over it.

Then you “**share in the Holy Spirit.**” You begin to sense a spiritual presence in yourself that is the personal presence of God within you and you grasp that the same presence in you is in others who have been similarly enlightened. It both supports you and builds the community.

Then also you “**taste the goodness of the word of God**” –this is about experiencing the goodness of the written word of God- realizing the value of the scripture which is tied to the HS’s enlightening of it’s content. And you also “**taste ... the power of the coming age**” that is, the life of the Kingdom of God that will come in completeness when Jesus returns begins to reveal itself to you in the present in your own life and in your own circumstances. The sense of New Creation “steals over you.”

Even in our authors warning there is a picture of forward progress in faith because we must “keep moving forward.” There is a danger if we do not. And the danger is this:

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4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, ... 6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.

The danger of NOT moving beyond the rudiments of Christianity, the danger of not allowing yourself to be taken forward to maturity, the danger of settling for a mere foundation is the potential for *falling away*.

Think of it this way. **You’re a salmon.** Your primary objective in life is forward movement to the very delta, river, stream, creek, the very gravel bed where you, yourself were hatched. To get to the source of life you must keep moving forward against the outflow from the river delta, against the current of the river and flow of the stream, and up the inclines of water falls. You get some respite in a slower pool. But the press of the water is always a constant opposition. So you keep moving forward. *If you stop moving forward- If you decide you’re just too tired and can’t do any more, or become too injured to follow the call of life and you give up- even for a moment- the opposing current WILL grab you up and carry you back and away from your goal and ultimately to your death.*

It’s the same for us. Luke tells us the Enemy showed Jesus ... all the kingdoms of the world 6 and said to him, ‘I will give you all this power and their splendor, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. The press of the world’s current is always against us. **The Enemy knows we must keep moving forward.**

He constantly works to turn up the pressure, to slow you down, to hold you back, to tire you out, to hamper and stymie your progress in the deadly hope that you might get tired and frustrated and give up and “settle” for singing your ABC’s or a half-built built foundation- or the conclusion: “What’s the point in going on any further!?” His evil hope is that you would give in to the press of his current and let it take you as you “fall away” from life into death.

Of course the scripture tells us... **Luke 1:37** "For nothing will be **impossible** with God." Jesus said, about salvation: **Mark 10:27** ... "With people it is **impossible**, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

And that's absolutely true. *But remember in empowering humans with "free will," God accepted self-imposed limits on his powers of intervention.* Both in that moment of enlightenment and every single day of our lives we are free to choose to keep moving forward or to fall away. And you might ask how can one fall away after being "enlightened, sharing the Spirit and the goodness of God's word?" In response I would ask you how could the first man and woman as pictured in Genesis -perfect, sinless, intimates of God- fall away? By asserting their free will. *So while nothing is impossible for God, we free-will-bearing humans, out of pride, out of habit, out of spite are quite capable of making our own repentance impossible-arresting our own forward movement.* Remember: the only sin that God *cannot* forgive is the sin that is not confessed.

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6 To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. The phrase "fallen away" that opens v6 **DOES NOT** mean accidentally or carelessly falling. According to Ben Witherington [NT scholar at Asbury Theological Seminary] the meaning of the Greek [parapipto] is "*deliberately stepping into a black hole.*" In the Septuagint- the Greek OT- the same word is used to refer to acting faithlessly or treacherously in regard to the Covenant. **So this "falling away is NOT accidental.** It is a deliberate, faithless choice to step off the path and stop one's forward movement.

Crucifixion was intended to be the most disgraceful death imaginable. That's why everyone crucified was whipped, stripped naked, marched through the city, and nailed spread-eagle to crossbeams with a sign listing their crimes nailed above their head- and all of it done publicly so all the world could see the disgrace.

Thanks to the internet and social media everyone who's ever "fallen away" as above has a ready-made soapbox to stand up and tell their story. And their stories all go like this: *I was a really devout Christian...But our church raised \$40K for a parking lot and I heard two pastors fighting over their jobs before the Easter Sunday service. Some other Christians told me my faith wasn't the right one, and someone told me I wasn't allowed to have doubts. Something bad happened to me and God didn't stop it and I don't like the idea of Hell and I don't like the rules about sex and it all seems incredibly stupid to me now so I'm done with it and you should be too.* Some are more foolish and some are incredibly tragic, and every one I've read is incredibly misinformed.

But everyone of these folks who have deliberately stepped off the path, who stopped moving forward, and are now letting the Enemy's current carry them back and away from Abundant Life- all these have basically stepped across the line to stand with Jesus' original executioners. And every time they tell their story they subject the Lord Jesus Christ to public disgrace.

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7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

The “rain often falling” is akin to the elementary teachings about Christ and our enlightenment, our sense of the Gift of Heaven, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the goodness of God’s word and the power of the coming age. All the things that God sends so we continue to produce for the Kingdom of God, and continue to grow up in Him, and so **we keep moving forward.**

But if anyone receives **all of that** and deliberately falls away- their Land producing only “thorns & thistles” [a reference to the curses of Gen 3]- they are not producing for the Kingdom. Their produce is worthless. They are not moving forward. They are in danger of the curse of destruction. *They are not growing up into Him. Nor is He growing up within them.*

I just watched the movie version of C.S. Lewis’ Prince Caspian. There’s a moment in the movie where Lucy sees Aslan for the first time in this Journey into Narnia. I didn’t remember it being in the book but sure enough I found it. She rushes to Him and throws her arms around him and kisses him and buries her face in his mane- sobbing “Aslan, Aslan. Dear Aslan,” ...“At last.” *The great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell, half sitting and half lying between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all round her. She gazed up into the large wise face.* “Welcome, child,” he said. “Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.” “That is because you are older, little one,” answered he. “Not because you are?” “**I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.**”

We, all of us, must move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity. We must “**keep moving forward.**” We must take in the refreshing rain of God, the Heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit, the goodness of God’s Word and Power and we must keep moving forward so that He grows up in us and we grow up into Him.

To stop pressing forward is to be carried away by the Enemy’s current and risk a Falling Away. So with all good Narnians we keep moving forward and we make our cry: “**Further up and further in.**”