

Going Beyond the Basics by the Power of God (Heb. 6.3)

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Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do if God permits.

Introduction

Readers of the book of Hebrews (then and now) who claim Christ are duty bound to go beyond the foundation to the superstructure of apostolic message **declared ... at first by the Lord, and ...attested to us by those who heard** (Heb. 2.2-3). Christians are to advance from the most elementary teachings of the gospel to the teachings of the Spirit through the apostles. God's people must go on to higher understanding of these teachings. *They must transcend the basics in the sense of going more fully into the fullness they represent foundationally.* They must work out the implications of the fundamentals; it is an edification issue of high importance. As Hughes puts it, "the point is that the beginning is not a stopping place; it is the door to progress and the springboard to achievement" (195).

Now, based on Hebrews 6.3, the title of this message is "Going beyond the basics by the power of God." The outline is twofold: the basics that we will transcend by the power of God and the power of God by which we will transcend the basics.

1A. The basics that we will transcend by the power of God

Six foundational basics come into view in this text. We have studied them one by one in some depth. Now, it is time to review.

1) Repentance

What is the essence of the call to leave the foundation of repentance from dead works and to go on to maturity? Both in your understanding and living, you must, the writer says, go way beyond the initial turning away from dead works to go on to grasp the full teaching of Christian godliness. You must press into action fruitful living of Christian godliness as a Christian athlete. You do this by study and practice, practice and study always exercising yourself in the fruits of righteous living for regular competition in the Christian race: **solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil** (Heb. 5.14 w/ 12.1). You study to practice, you study the practice, and *you practice what you study* in striving for improvement always to learn and live Christian charity and its fruits. Clearly, being a Christian is not a "one-time repentance." Christianity involves a repentant life (bringing forth the fruits of repentance, Mat. 3.8).

2) Faith

The essence of the duty before you regarding faith is that you are to go beyond faith by entrusting yourself to God in Christ more and more as you learn more and more about Him. This means that you will aggressively pursue *the* faith, the teachings of the word of Christ. It also means that you will learn more and more about the one you believe, *you will discover His faithfulness, and that discovery will draw you forward* in wise and faithful living for God. How can you do any less when you grasp even a little of the faithfulness of God to you?

Therefore, transcending faith toward God means two essential things: you will go beyond faith to the faith and beyond faith to faithfulness. The key to Christian faith is learning the faith regarding how to live faithfully under the authority of Christ. True faith will not be content with understanding simply the sketch of Christian teaching as if one is on the outside looking in and seeing things in a superficial, distant, and dim way.

3) Baptism

A central way to transcend baptism is to go on to the fullness of baptism as a gospel sign.

Baptism as a gospel sign is a fact that brings with it a duty, namely, to promote the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3). Moreover, you transcend baptism when you receive it as God's word of promise that testifies to you at your baptism, when you witness the baptism

of others, and when you study the doctrine of baptism in Scripture. By these means, you access the promise of God for the strengthening of your faith.

4) Laying on of hands

In the history of redemption, the laying on of hands teaches us that God touches sinners literally with His hands in Christ to bless them with healing by the Holy Spirit through duly ordained pastors.

For the apostolic period of the church, the work of Christ brought the blessings of the Spirit (such as word gifts of tongues, prophesy and prophetic song) in order to put the foundation of the church in place. The foundation is the commissioned apostolic witness to Christ in oral and then written form. The product of the laying on of hands is the gospel of the NT particularly embodied in the record of healing miracles. Christ now gives that gospel blessing of the Spirit through ordained preachers who enter into the labors of the apostles by the laying on of hands for the proclamation of their message in post-apostolic times to the end of the age.

In a word, conversation on Scripture with one another and with the pastor is on the top of the list for going beyond the sketch of the laying on of hands. You help me transcend my ordination in practical ways when you share your needs with me for prayer, seek my counsel, converse with me on the Scriptures, and use me as a resource. These things prompt me forward to fulfill my calling by the laying on of hands; to do so with joy, and this is for your advantage (profit unto edification), as Hebrews 13.13-17 tells us.

¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. [your profit depends on how you help the pastor help you]

5) Resurrection of the dead

When Jesus appeared on the scene of human history, He brought the fact of resurrection into the clear light of day: **the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel** (2 Tim. 1.10). Accordingly, resurrection means that you will never die. Resurrection means that you will have a new body. Resurrection means you presently share in Christ's resurrection. Resurrection means that your work is not in vain.

Therefore, *apply this reality to your work* on earth. *Work with a spring in your step* for the glory of God and to please the Lord since nothing you do is for naught. Everything you do has value; nothing you do is in vain because, in the end, the great enemy, death, has no final victory over you in Christ. The sting of death is sin, but the death and resurrection of Christ conquered both sin and death. As a sure result of His accomplished work, you are bound for the glory of the resurrection. Therefore, you have encouragement to work hard at whatever you do in the remaining days of your time on earth. By this kind of hard work, you go beyond resurrection as a foundational fact to maturity for righteousness of life.

6) Eternal judgment

A day is coming when our Lord will separate the unrighteous from the righteous: ⁴⁹ **So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous** ⁵⁰ **and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Mat. 13.47-50). That separation of unbelievers from believers brings a freedom of a marvelous sort. That is part of what makes heaven a place of happiness and peace. It is also part of what makes hell a place of punishment. Hell is to be outside of the fellowship with God and His family (outside the camp and city walls).

God dwells with His people and wipes away every tear, but, for those who are outside, it is a different story. The passage clearly states the fact of conscious suffering, anguish, and sorrow upon sorrow. The gnashing of teeth speaks obviously; of what a person often does when in extreme pain. It may also indicate intense anger that shows the depth of the stubbornly unrepentant heart. Nonetheless, God has a people and He will save them. He has a method of saving them, which is the casting of the gospel net into a sea of fallen sinners, embracing all men

everywhere indiscriminately, and working effectively in the hearts of His elect people by that gospel.

We have the job of spreading the word by casting it like a fish net into the sea. This balances our thinking about the warning to avoid casting gospel pearls before swine. We are to be sensitive to dog-like and pig-like responses to our message, but we are to spread the word as best we can to all men everywhere. We go beyond judgment when we live our gratitude to Christ who was judged in our place. We go beyond judgment when, in light of this sobering doctrine, we seek to spread His word of deliverance from judgment in the promise of the gospel.

The above six things are the basics that we will transcend by the power of God. In a packed sentence going beyond the basics involves a) living the repentant life, b) displaying faithfulness rooted in the apostolic faith, c) growth in the faith by the experience and study of baptism as a gospel sign, d) personal submission to pastoral care, e) deepening hope in the resurrection from the dead in its application to you personally, and f) abiding gratitude to Christ for enduring eternal punishment in your place. Now, we need to consider our second main point.

2A. The power by which we transcend the basics

The power is sovereign power according to Hebrews 6.3: "if God permits." We get helpful explanation of this striking "if" from Matthew 8.1-4 and James 4.13-17.

1B. Sovereign power in the healing of a leper (Mat. 8.1-4)

A leper came to Jesus with a request to be healed of his debilitating and deforming disease. He approached the Lord with boldness and reverence. Perhaps the most striking part of the man's request, is the submissiveness it shows: **behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."** ³ **And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed** (Mat. 8.2-3). The bold, reverent, and trusting request is striking in its submission when he says, "Lord, if you will" (Mat. 8.2b). Saying "if" leaves the healing as an open issue. This man shows a reverent and bold faith at its apex. Here is the dependence of faith. The man depends on the Lord Himself as a personal Lord who is free and sovereign in all that He does. Thus, the man says, "If you will" by which he says, "I acknowledge and submit to the fact that my life, my physical health, my existence in total is in your hands, and all outcomes are due to your will, O Lord." That is the meaning of Hebrews 6.3.

2B. God's sovereign power in the affairs of life (James 4.13-17, to explain the "if")

Matthew stresses this acknowledgement of sovereignty in the leper's request. The writer of Hebrews does the same but with a focus on our duty to go beyond the basics. Perhaps, the best explanation of the sovereign will of God is the one James gives: ¹³ **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"** ¹⁴ **yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.** ¹⁵ **Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."** ¹⁶ **As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.** ¹⁷ **So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin** (James 4.13-17). Note the balance of things per this text. There is a combination of hard work and careful planning toward the goal of profit making. These are good things in the right context. However, they are not good if you fail to give due recognition to the uncertainty of the future and the brevity and frailty of life. They are not good if you arrogantly leave God out of the picture and if you do not work hard at doing the right things. Notably, a central "right thing" is what you think and say about your work and plans: **you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that"** (v.15).

This thinking that you verbalize is a constant frame of mind that acknowledges that no step of work, detail of planning, or secured goal will come to pass unless God wills it for you. You are arrogant (James 4.16) if you fail to acknowledge that God frustrates the plans of men, and His will stands forever: ¹⁰ **The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.** ¹¹ **The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.** ¹² **Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!** ¹³ **The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;** ¹⁴ **from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,** ¹⁵ **he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.** ¹⁶ **The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.** ¹⁷ **The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot**

rescue. ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹ that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹ For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name (Ps. 33.10-21).

To be clear and to get the full promise that we have in the book of Hebrews, we should note some things. A) Hebrews 6.3 is a promise with regard to the work that we put forth in our efforts to go beyond the basics and on to maturity. B) The promise is not only that we will make progress in the building project if we try; it is also the promise that we will persevere in trying to make progress. In other words, perseverance is a duty and a promise at the same time. As Calvin states, "it is not in man's power to bound at once, whenever he pleases, from the starting point to the goal; but progress in our course is the special gift of God" (Hebrews, 135). C) The teaching is paradoxical. Both elements are true and it may, at times, be difficult to see how the one does not cancel out the other. As if they are two ropes hanging in a well out of which we are trying to climb, we must hold on to both of them because they are one rope running through a pulley above us. If we grab on to one rope and stress it to the neglect of the other, we do so to our peril. We need both teachings. Both are true and both contribute to our salvation and sanctification.

Conclusion

We will go on: the pastor will go on to more advanced teaching and the flock will go on to more advanced learning...if God wills. "If" indicates an openness that we need to ponder. The following observations about Hebrews 6.3 help us do this.

1) Hebrews 6.3 teaches that some may not live out what they profess.

Others will live their profession. The difference depends on the will of God.

2) It is certain that the people of God will make progress by the power of God.

At every juncture, advances forward depend on God's decision from start to finish. The fact of progress is certain for we know of His determination to save those given to Christ in the eternal covenant of redemption. Still, the progress unfolds at every stage according to the purpose and plan of God by which His family members make progress *differently* as the Lord so purposes it. Thus, this is a promise that gives rest, encouragement, hope, and guidance. When we are battered on the battlefield in the fight against sin, God promises that we will win the war, even if we may lose some difficult battles along the way.

3) All depends on God; therefore you have some hard work to do.

Progress for you who belong to God is a fact. It is certain that you covenant brothers and sisters of Christ will forge ahead all the way to glory. However, these facts do not alter the duty you have to persevere; in fact, God's sovereignty encourages persistent warfare. This is so because when you are in a fight that you strongly desire to win, it can only lift your spirit and strengthen your resolve to know that you will win. You will win the prize of the high calling in Christ due to the fact that Jesus tasted your eternal death to protect you from it once and for all (2.9). Union with Him in the eternal covenant, guarantees that those who submit to Christ as their risen prophet, priest, and king will make progress on the path of sanctification: ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Heb. 2.11-15).

Because of your union with Christ before He came into the world, you are one with Him and part of the family that constitutes His brothers and sisters through the certain deliverance He secured for you through His death. You will go beyond as you take up the means if God so wills it, which is just to say that you will make progress according to the will of your heavenly Father; your progress (with some down turns) is firm and sure because Jesus says, I will; be clean (Mat. 8.3).

May we fall down before the majesty and loving-kindness of the triune God to whom belongs all glory, now and forevermore, amen.