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The Backside of the Race, Part 5

When Others Fall

Witnessing or hearing of another reputed Christian falling away from the faith, is very discouraging for a child of God. When one has fought the good fight of faith alongside someone, only to learn a couple of years later that this brother whose walk was such an encouragement (especially when you were doubting God) and to hear that he has now rejected the faith, and is living like a non-believer is heartbreaking.

When we hear things like this it can shake us. For if after all they experienced and said they believed, if they could fall away, the what hope is there for me? How can I know that I won't fall away too?

Now to make matters worse, we are told in Scripture that in the Last Days apostasy, falling away from the faith, will not be abnormal.

1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."

In fact there will be those who "profess that they know God; but in works they deny him." (Titus 1:16). And we are told that many will go "out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).

So what encouragement is there that we will not go the way of so many? What's to keep us going on the Backside of the Race?

I hope you are encouraged as we consider these final words given to a group of Christians who themselves were on the Backside of the Race. The Hebrew believers of this text started well. They came to Christ when Christianity wasn't fashionable, and yet their faith was real. Grace had won their heart. Having known the slavery of sin, Christ was nothing less than the aroma of life. And as a result they paid the price, in the form of

persecution, the seizure of their property, and the loss of loved ones to jail. But they didn't care; they had Christ!

Yet the truth be known, you can live only so long in the “crisis mode” before you become exhausted, or even worse, before you begin to shrink back. And it was this that was threatening this early congregation. Certainly there has to be something better than this. We go from trial to trial, difficulty to difficulty; certainly God never intended life to be like this. Long it has been since we felt any passion for the Lord.

Family of God, not only did God intend for us to live like this but this is part and parcel of life on the Backside of the Race. In a marathon¹ you start well. There's the fan fare. You have boundless energy. There's confidence, strength, anticipation. But then you enter the backside and all of this evaporates. Your support base is gone. You hit the wall with its pain and doubting. Because the other athletes themselves are just trying to get by, no one seems to care about you. There's the feeling of being on your own. And thus the temptation is to wash out and quit.

This is where our passage found these Hebrew believers. This is where life finds many of us! And so that the Hebrew Believers might not wash out and quit, this passage was penned to encourage them!

What was the exhortation?

First the frustrations that confront the believer is not strange or unique. Also the place you find yourself is not the result of hostility on the part of God toward you. Life in this state will be difficult for the believer. Yet the grace by which you were saved, by which you first served the Lord, which led to a life of holiness, fellowship, devotion, prayer, and the like is the grace by which you must continue to live. In the words of Christ.

Revelation 2:5, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

That's the exhortation of this text.

Hebrews 10:35-36, “Cast not away therefore your confidence [i.e., that which characterized your early living], which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

Now that the Hebrews might endure and not loose heart in their calling to continue to live the life of faith, our passage closes with four words of encouragement.

- Verse 36b: THE Promise which was given to the fathers belongs also to you- only you must finish the race!
- Verse 37: However you will not finish the race before Christ personally comes to take you home.
- Verse 38a: The word of exhortation penned here has been the calling of God's people throughout redemptive history. It was what was commanded of God's people during the time of Isaiah, 740 BC,² and Habakkuk, 605 BC.³ And it is that which remains our calling today.

A Word of Affirmation

With that, let's consider the fourth and final word of encouragement given to these believers on the Backside of the Race. You will note that it is a word of affirmation.

¹ Recall that this is the metaphor alluded to in our text. Compare Hebrews 11:32-36

² Compare Isaiah 26:20

³ Compare Habakkuk 2:3-4

Hebrew 10:38-39, “Now the just shall live by faith⁴: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

The focus of these latter verses clearly is the “pleasure of God” and its relation to our “shrinking back.” Verse 38 introduces this concept: “if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” Verse 39 affirms that the Hebrew believers ever and always will be well-pleasing to God.

Hebrews 10:39, “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

In other words, we are ones who please the Lord! From this it is obvious that the fourth word of encouragement given to those on the backside of the race is the affirmation that God indeed is well-pleased with them. Yet this bears some explaining.

In order to explain this, I want to pose and answer two questions. The first question is the what. When it comes to God’s pleasure, what is it? When we speak of that which pleases God, what are we addressing?

Secondly there is the how. How does a man place himself in the position where he is pleasing to God?

What is God’s Pleasure?

When we talk about the pleasure of God there are a variety of words used in the Bible to denote that which pleases, in fact there are at least eight of them.⁵ Now if you lump these eight words together and keep only those passages which refer to God, you come up with three nuances or usages of the word *pleasure*.

The Pleasure of God can refer simply to God's preceptive will; i.e., that which God has stated as that which is His desire. Such passages which fall into this category would be these:

Psalm 40:8, “I delight to do thy will⁶ [pleasure], O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”

1 Corinthians 12:18, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”

The Pleasure of God can refer to what I have termed as “creative pleasure;”- i.e., the type of pleasure God had at creation when He surveyed His work. When God created the world, He sat back and took delight in what He beheld.

Genesis 1:31, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very⁷ good⁸. And the

⁴ This could be rendered faithfulness, LXX

⁵ The following are the eight...

a. *Hamad* and *hasaq* which usually are translated as desire.

b. *Rasah* which generally is translated as please or pleasure.

c. *Hapes* which denotes favor.

d. *Gil* which involves deep emotional involvement (typically that which exists between a man and a woman).

e. *Aresko*, and the adjective *arestos*, typically are translated as “pleasing.”

f. *Theho* which references that which is someone's will or wish.

g. *Eudokeo* references someone or something that is well-thought of.

h. *Spatalao* is used of riotous pleasure.

⁶ נוספתא רצונו raw-tstone'

evening and the morning were the sixth day.”

There was a pleasure here that God did not have prior to creation which was evoked on account of it.

Well when a child of God conforms to creation standards, attains to garden living, in his thoughts, words, deeds, holiness, commitment, and devotion the divine response, just like at creation, is “very good!”⁹ And thus we read throughout Scripture of God's people, saved people, endeavoring to please God or actually succeeding.

1 Kings 3:10, “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”

When Solomon opted for wisdom over wealth, power, longevity, and the like the result was that God was pleased as at creation! The Psalmist also prayed these words:

Psalm 104:34, “My meditation of him shall be sweet [pleasing]¹⁰: I will be glad in the LORD.

It was the Psalmist's desire that his thoughts please the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:9, “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”

This was Paul's goal throughout life, pleasing God, eliciting from God what was said at the beginning, “very good!”

Hebrews 11:6, “**But without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

In the context of the chapter, it is clear that the “faith” spoken about in verse 6 involves more than the faith that leads to justification. The faith referenced here is primarily a practical faith. Hence when God sees us living moment by moment in dependence upon Him, it is as if He is gazing upon the dependence that Adam and Eve had in the garden- “and behold, it was very good!”

Now it is important to note that the pleasure evoked in God by the actions/thoughts of His people is not meritorious or something that the believer earns — as if now that I've pleased Him He will bless me. Rather it is God's rightful response to His own re-creative work, worked-out in us.

Hebrews 13:21, “Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

See any thing we could do that might evoke pleasure in the heart of God is only that which God works in us. So it is not that God actually is impressed by sinful man. Rather what impresses Him is, again, His own creative work, worked out in us.

⁷ מֵאוֹד m@'od

⁸ טוֹב towb

⁹ This is the basis for the Reformed understanding of the arts. When we re-create after God (paint a picture, write a song), we participate in something that is good (1 Tim. 4:4) and therefore pleases God.

This follows also in the moral realm. Christ is the Logos (i.e., reality) and everything beyond is but shadow deriving its meaning and significance from Him (Colossians 2:17). As such there is very little difference in terms of response when God gazes upon a flower as when He gazes upon a holy or righteous act. In so far as both reflect the Logos (original creation, reality as God created it), they are *tov meod* and so pleasing to the Lord (cf. the writings of Francis Schaeffer and class notes of Jerome Barrs' lectures from seminary).

¹⁰ עֵרֵב 'areb

And by way of note, if we have been redeemed, then we now have redeemed affections. That which ultimately will be pleasing to us will be when we conform to the tupos of creation — Jesus Christ. He is as we were created to be fully conformed to the will of God and thereby enjoying sinless communion. Based on this it should be obvious that the non-believer is incapable of pleasing the Lord (as fallen beings, they need first to be re-created into the image of Christ). And thus we read these words:

Romans 8:8, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Finally the Pleasure of God refers to that which is ceremonially clean and therefore acceptable to Him. Such passages in this category would be these:¹¹

Psalm 149:4, “For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.”

This is not a pleasure which arises on account of what we do. No! When a person comes to Christ, he becomes ever and always pleasing to the Lord!

Psalm 51:16, “For thou desirest¹² not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest¹³ not in burnt offering.”

It is not what we do that makes us acceptable to God. Rather God delight is found in us when we are robed in Christ. When an individual comes to understand his spiritual bankruptcy he does not make offerings, rather he clings to Christ. Accordingly, David knew that that which only could please God was Christ in him.

Hebrews 10:8-10, “Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

God does not take pleasure in sacrifices alone. What pleases God is doing His will.

Do you see it?

That which is said to please God here is the doing of His will.

And what is God's will?

The will of God is the cross-work of Christ by which we are reconciled to God. From this we conclude that when a person is saved on account of Christ, they become objects in which God takes delight! This category references salvific pleasure whereby the child of God ever and always is well-pleasing to God, even when the Christian is sinning.

How can God be salvifically pleased with the Christian if the Christian is sinning?

The answer lies in the nature of salvation. In salvation

- The Christian is robed in the righteousness of Christ, Romans 3:24-4:5; cf. Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:8.
- God's wrath has been removed from us on account of Christ's death, Romans 3:25.

¹¹ Isaiah 9:17; Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11 could also be placed into this category

¹² חִפְּתִים chaphets

¹³ רָצָה ratsah

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, Romans 8:1.
- There is never a time when God is not thrilled with you.
- There is never a time when you are ceremonially unclean.

When we speak of “pleasing” in relation to God, those are the three categories:

- The Pleasure of His Will.
- The Pleasure which is aroused when He beholds His Creative work.
- The Pleasure of Redemption.

Now of the three categories of God's pleasure referenced above, our text is clearly speaking of the pleasure that God takes when we are redeemed. Notice the parallel expressions here.

- Hebrews 10:38b: “...and if he shrinks back, My soul has NO PLEASURE in him.”
- Hebrews 10:39a: “But we are not of those who shrink back to DESTRUCTION...”

In this text “no pleasure” and “destruction/condemnation” are parallel expressions.¹⁴ That being the case the focus of the Hebrew writer here is the salvific pleasure of God. It is this truth that is being used to encourage the child of God on the Backside of the Race.

How is Salvific Pleasure Maintained?

And that brings us to THE SECOND QUESTION when it comes to the “pleasure of God” as referenced here: How is this type of pleasure- salvific pleasure- maintained?

The answer simply stated is through our perseverance in relying upon Christ!

Hebrews 10:39, “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

The faith referenced here is that faith mentioned in verse 32-36, their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Hebrew writer knew that the Hebrews would ever and always remain pleasing to God, because he knew that they'd never stop relying upon their Lord. And again, that affirmation is the fourth word of encouragement here!

You say, “How can he say this with such confidence? He's not God, how does he know what these believers are going to do?”

The answer is rooted and grounded in the doctrine of perseverance found in Scripture. Salvation

- Was conceived in Eternity Past, Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 2:8b.
- Is according to the predetermined plan of God, Acts 13:48; Ephesians 1:4.
- Occurs as God gives a man the faith to believe, Ephesians. 2:8-9; John. 6:44; 15:16.
- From start to finish is of Christ, Hebrews 12:2.

Scripture teaches that salvation can never be lost. If you are saved, then you can never “shrink back unto destruction!

Psalm 37:28, “For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.”

¹⁴ Compare Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TOTC, page 224.

This is why when David's covenant child died, David had the assurance that someday, he would be with his son in heaven.¹⁵ Christ proclaimed the doctrine of perseverance.

John 6:37-39, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will [or pleasure] of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. "

John 10:27-29, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

The Apostle Paul proclaimed the doctrine of perseverance.

1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Apostle Peter proclaims the doctrine of perseverance.

1 Peter 1:5, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

And the book of Jude proclaims the doctrine of perseverance.

Jude 24, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,"

In light of all of this, the Hebrew writer could say with utmost certainty that we will not "shrink back to destruction," but rather "have faith to the preserving of the soul" **WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT WE ALWAYS WILL BE PLEASING TO THE LORD.**

And with that we are brought to the fourth and final word given to the weary pilgrim on the Backside of the Race a word of Affirmation! No matter

- How poorly you may run.
- Our miserable attempts at service.
- The doubts, the sin, the fear.
- The slander in our hearts toward God.

If you are in Christ then you not only will persevere unto the end, BUT in and through it all you will be well-pleasing to God! Isn't that great?!

Now brothers and sisters, I referenced this toward the end of last week, but it bears much contemplation on our part. Again as we have entered the Backside of the Race, there is much over which to be concerned

¹⁵ Compare 2 Samuel 12:23

- We are tired.
- Our zeal has dissipated.
- We aren't living the way we thought we would.
- We look in the mirror and do not see someone who is “overwhelmingly conquering.”
- Rather we see our failure, sins, and defeat.

And so what do we typically do? We do one of two things: Either we settle in our walks accepting our deformity and concluding that we were never intended to enjoy “the higher life.” Or, in the mad pursuit to feel like we did at the beginning, we cast off the faith of our youth for something more

- A teaching.
- A practice.
- A person.
- A movement.

.Now all of this could be avoided if we just understood God's opinion of us- which is the word of affirmation. According to this text the only thing that will displease God on the Backside of the Race is we shrink back!

The question is will we shrink back?

The Hebrew writer says, absolutely not for we are held by the hand of Christ.

Thus what is God's assessment when we know we are less than desirable?

God's assessment is this: The love with which I have loved you remains. If I loved you when you were my enemy, now that you are my child do you think I could stop loving you? Well done, thou good and faithful servant!

Song of Solomon

In fact as we close, I want you to see this same message from the Song of Solomon. This book, written by Solomon, celebrates marital love. Specifically it shows the love between a man and a woman ****AND**** the love between Christ and His bride, the church.¹⁶ Our text occurs shortly after their wedding day when the intensity of love had diminished.

Song of Solomon 5:2, “I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.”

It is late and well-passed the time to sleep. .So Solomon's wife locked the door, took off her outer robe, and went to sleep. But then she heard a knock and the voice of her husband saying, “Open the door, let us enjoy our love.”

Yet she is in no mood.

Song of Solomon 5:3, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?”

¹⁶ This passage is showing us how Biblical theology practically applies to our marriages.

It is too late; I'm too tired; the floor is too cold... maybe some other time.

Song of Solomon 5:4-5, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock."

But then the door handle jiggled and her heart was changed. So she rushes to the door, grabs the handle, and there smells the fragrance of his cologne.

Song of Solomon 5:6, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer."

The beauty here is that Solomon did not leave angry; he left because in his love he didn't want to inconvenience his wife. Yet for the wife, she is brokenhearted. She turned away the love of her husband. He was gone... a moment lost to eternity.

But she was not thwarted. She begins looking for Solomon everywhere. Somewhat frantic she begins asking people, "Have you seen my husband?" Finally she discovers him in the garden. Knowing she had done wrong, knowing that she had rejected His love, she approaches tentatively expecting him to be angry.

And yet what does he say to her?

Song of Solomon 6:4, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners."

These were the words he spoke to her on their wedding night!

The message of Solomon is one and the same as our text! Though we are weary, tired, heartless, and trample underfoot the love of our Beloved. Our beauty to God is not diminished! He still loves us! And the words He spoke to us the moment we were saved, are the same words He says to us throughout the entire race, "There is therefore now no condemnation!" (Romans 8:1).

In light of that, though the Backside of the Race leads through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

- Will you maintain your faith in Christ?
- Will you continue to live by grace?
- Will the life of grace be that after which you strive?

With the unconditional love of Christ whereby today we stand well-pleasing before God, how could we do anything else?

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About the Preacher

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