

# It Is Written

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## A Consistent Faith

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The letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast to their faith (Heb. 10:23) in the midst of persecutions, and the writer pointed to the numerous “better” things they enjoyed in Christ, as compared to the life they lived under the Old Law. It seems they had already suffered persecutions because they had left the Law of Moses behind to follow Christ (Heb. 10:32-34), but some were apparently willing to turn their backs on Christ and go back to following the Old Law in the hope it would eliminate the persecutions. While the persecutions may, indeed, have ceased, they would not be in a better position, for they would be turning their backs on the sacrifice that saved them (Heb. 6:4-6), and those animal sacrifices could not do what the blood of Jesus Christ did (Heb. 10:1-18). The Old Law was now “obsolete” (Heb. 8:13), and the thinking that they would still be pleasing to God was simply misguided and wrong.

I will not take the time in this short study to enumerate the many superior things of the New Covenant versus the things of the Old Law; that is a study for another day. Today, I would like us to consider a few words the writer gives to these brethren near the end of the letter to remind them that even in the midst of trials, they still had to remember that a consistent faith would be demonstrated by the things they did, and whether or not they faced persecutions. For us, this is a reminder that a consistent faith is one that does all the things God wants us to do as demonstrations of our faith, regardless of the circumstances.

Many times, we allow circumstances to dictate our behavior and our actions, rather than being guided by God's will. In persecutions, we might be tempted to forgo evangelism, since that would only bring more attention to us; in difficult times, we may be tempted to be less hospitable, excusing ourselves by telling ourselves and others, "The Lord understands we don't have a lot right now"; in various ways, we may be less likely to demonstrate our faith in God in the very times and circumstances we could be powerful examples of people whose trust is in God!

For a few minutes, consider the following exhortations of the writer of Hebrews as he closes out the letter, and the things he reminds them that were still true as demonstrations of their faith. Let us learn that faith is always active, not dependent on circumstances.

**Hospitality Still Important. (Heb. 13:1-3)** In spite of whatever difficulties they might have been facing, it was no excuse for not showing hospitality. It is in those opportunities we may be doing a greater work than what we know. Those imprisoned [likely, because of their faith, too] were of special note. "Out of sight, out of mind" should not have ever been the case with those who were in chains. This echoes what Jesus taught about the importance of simple hospitality in the final judgment (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

If we remember that some of these disciples had already suffered “the plundering of your goods” (Heb. 10:34), we see that material abundance was not a prerequisite for hospitality! Even in difficult circumstance, we can still show hospitality, and Peter also reminds us we are to “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). Hospitality is a demonstration of our love for others, and that is not conditioned on us having an abundance of material goods or riches. Don't let your lack of abundance be an excuse for not being hospitable.

**Purity Still Important. (Heb. 13:4)** Having already suffered persecution and likely still in the midst of more, these brethren could not excuse themselves from righteous behavior in any aspect of their lives; purity still mattered. An important point here must be noted for us, too: It is only within the marriage relationship that sexual relationships are pure. Anything else is either fornication or adultery.

At all times, disciples must show themselves to be ones who live by a higher standard, and here is where it most often demonstrates such a difference. In the world today, the only standard is your fleshly desires; the world says you should be able to have sexual relations with whoever and whenever you want. God's people do not have the same standard, obviously, so we should not let circumstances persuade us to lower the standard and seek 'comfort' or pleasure by sexually immoral behavior.

**Covetousness Still Wrong. (Heb. 13:5, 6)** Whatever the circumstances, Christians cannot have greedy, covetous hearts and be pleasing to God. All Christians, no matter how materially destitute they may be, should not resort to materialism and greed; we should be content with whatever we have, knowing God is always with us and He always knows our needs. [Needs, not wants.]

The wise writer once asked of God, "Give me neither poverty nor riches — feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God" (Prov. 30:8, 9). He illustrated the dangers of both wealth and poverty, and the danger of allowing circumstances to dictate our behavior. Our trust must be in the living God, and not in uncertain riches (1 Tim. 6:17).

**Sacrifices Still Important. (Heb. 13:15, 16)** The sacrifice of Christ was sufficient to take away our sins, but just as there were also thank offerings and peace offerings, we do have offerings we can make to God that are pleasing to Him: praise and thanks to His name and sharing. We can't offer a sacrifice for sin, but we can offer those kinds of sacrifices, and they are pleasing to God. Let's not "forget to do" these things!

But, as was noted earlier, we sometimes allow our circumstances to dictate our participation in this good work. Sometimes, we excuse ourselves by saying we are "too overwhelmed" to think about worshiping with the brethren or praying or praising God even at home; sometimes, circumstances are such that we excuse ourselves from sharing with others, explaining, "We don't have anything to share." [But we do — and much more than we like to admit, sometimes.] Friends and brethren, if "God is well pleased" with such sacrifices, wouldn't it be in our best interest to find a way — regardless of circumstances? Just how serious are we about pleasing Him?

The point in all this is simple: Keep practicing your faith, regardless of circumstances; "fair-weather Christians" are not the kind that will be pleasing to the Lord. Let us look beyond the here-and-now and whatever circumstances we find ourselves in and live lives of faith, fully trusting in God through the good times and the bad. At no time should we let circumstances be an excuse for not trusting in the Lord.

In the most difficult of times, and when even his wife was ready to throw in the towel, Job reminded her, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job. 2:10). True faith is not dependent on circumstance, but on the one in who our faith rests. And with that, we have no reason to doubt, and no excuse for inaction.