

- c. The writer felt compelled to warn his readers about the danger and consequence of straying away from the Lord they'd embraced. Indeed, he recognized that every Christian faces the same challenge to his faith, and so included himself in his warning (v. 26). He'd have been unfaithful to these beloved saints to withhold this admonition, and yet he had had strong confidence that they did truly belong to the Good Shepherd and would continue with Him until the end (ref. 6:1-12). Thus he immediately followed his warning with another word of encouragement, this time an exhortation to reflect on their history with Jesus, from the time their eyes were opened and they embraced Him as Messiah, through all that they'd endured in walking out their days with Him up to the present. Their Lord and merciful High Priest had preserved them through much hardship and suffering, and He would continue to do so, whatever the future might hold. They had only to spend a few moments reflecting on their journey with Jesus to be convinced that His love and gracious power were sufficient for them; He'd carried them thus far, and would deliver them safe on the last day. Their own experience showed the validity of their faith, and they needed to persevere in it (10:32-39).

And so, there are two dimensions to the writer's exhortation: First, he exhorted his readers to reflect back on their lives as Jesus' followers in order to put their present challenges and concerns into proper perspective (10:32-34). Second, he charged them to look forward – to hold fast to their faith that had brought them thus far, and to do so in view of the destiny appointed for them (10:35-39).

The first part of the exhortation, then, was a call to *remembrance*. These Hebrews were to think back on their experiences since they embraced Jesus as Messiah, particularly the persecution and hardship that had been inflicted on them. The writer himself reminded them of their ordeal of suffering, which indicates either that he was part of their community of believers, or he'd been informed of what they had endured. The fact that he was *writing* to them suggests the latter, but either way, he was well aware of their suffering and the challenges to their faith; indeed, it was that awareness and his concern for them that motivated his letter.

He referred to their ordeal as a multi-faceted struggle of suffering, all of which derived from their faith in Jesus and faithfulness in following Him as Yahweh's Messiah. That suffering included open and public abuse and humiliation, both verbal and physical. It was directed at them because of their personal faith, but also because they determined to stand together with their believing (likely Jewish) brothers and sisters (v. 33). Beyond being willing to suffer for their own sake, they embraced the suffering of their brethren, even under the threat of great personal loss. Personal circumstances might compel someone to surrender his worldly goods and well-being, but these Hebrews willingly forfeited theirs for the joy of standing with their fellow saints. And they did so, not out of altruism or philanthropy, but with the clear conviction of who they were and the kingdom they inhabited; they understood that they had a better and lasting possession – a “possession” consisting of the full inheritance of all that God eternally ordained for His regal and priestly image-children (cf. 2:5-13 with Romans 8:16-21).

It was important that these Hebrews think back on their journey with their Lord, not only to recall His abiding care, but also to remind themselves of why they embraced Him in the first place. They'd come to recognize Jesus as Israel's long-awaited Messiah: Yahweh's elect priest-king through whose resurrection He'd inaugurated His everlasting kingdom. By embracing Jesus, they were embracing God's new creation of which He is the firstfruits (2 Corinthians 5:14-17), and so also their own destiny as sharers in His resurrection life and eternal glory (Romans 8:16-23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

This reflection, then, set these Hebrews' gaze on the future as much as on the past. But it also gave proper perspective to the present; *it reminded them of who they were in Him*: By God's goodness and power through His Spirit, they were now heirs of all that Jesus is heir to. They were already seated in the heavenly realm in Him, and His perpetual presence and provision in the Spirit were His pledge that their own status as priest-kings would be fully realized (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 1:1-6, 5:1-10).

Thus the birthright of God's children is triumphal and unshakeable *confidence* – bold assurance that is grounded in Jesus' triumph, and that looks ahead to the *reward* His triumph has secured (10:35). The noun here rendered “reward” occurs only in this epistle (ref. 2:2, 11:26), and refers to appropriate recompense – i.e., that which is proper or necessary to a given condition or circumstance. Thus it can be negative (retribution) or positive (reward), and here the sense is clearly positive. “Reward” is a good rendering, so long as the connotation of *propriety* is kept in mind. That is, the writer wasn't referring to the future reward of personal bliss in heaven, as many Christians like to imagine. No, this reward is the believer's participation in the consummate realization of God's purpose for His creation, the purpose that has human beings at the center; it is the reward of being part of God's everlasting family of image-children who share in the glory and regal vocation of His singular Image-Son.

This reward, then, and the bold confidence of it, were to stir up the readers' zeal and resolve to stand firm in faith and faithfulness: They needed to persevere in doing God's will, fully assured that they would receive the promised reward (10:36). Christians often go astray at this point, focusing on the matter of “doing the will of God,” without recognizing that this concept must be understood in the same way the “reward” is. For God's *will* is His active, persistent commitment to His design for His creation, the achievement of which defines the *reward* that comes to His children. And so, people “do His will” when they devote themselves to the goal that He's devoted to, cherishing its outcome as their own great reward. The issue of doing God's will, then, isn't complying with scriptural imperatives as such, but living into life's moments, circumstances and challenges with the mind of Christ in the power of the Spirit (cf. Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10, 10:1-6; Ephesians 4:17-5:17, 6:5-8; Philippians 3:1-4:1; Colossians 1:1-3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5; 1 Peter 2:1-24, 4:1-19; 1 John 2:15-17).

The writer challenged his readers to hold tightly to their confidence in Jesus and His great triumph, and so persevere in living out their faith in Him. This was an obligation their Jewish ancestors never faced, precisely because it has the resurrected and enthroned Messiah as its focal point. These Hebrews and their Israelite forefathers didn't share the same *object* of faith, but they shared the same *obligation* of faith; from the beginning, the covenant children understood that God's righteous ones are characterized by faith. This truth was fundamental to Abraham's relationship with God (Genesis 15:1-6), and it became part of Israel's national identity and consciousness. But now, in the fullness of the times, it had taken on new significance with Messiah's coming. So the Hebrews writer cited from the prophet Habakkuk and his exhortation to the righteousness of faith, but from the perspective of its relevance for Yahweh's restored people (10:37-38).

The citation comes from Habakkuk 2:3-4, and the context of Habakkuk's prophecy was the impending destruction of Jerusalem and desolation of Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. The statements cited by the Hebrews writer were part of Yahweh's answer to the prophet when he questioned how He could punish His people's iniquity and unfaithfulness using a pagan nation far worse than them (1:1-17). This appeared unjust to Habakkuk, but Yahweh's response showed that this horrific fate was fully warranted; Judah – the remnant of David's kingdom – had become a corrupt and unclean harlot whose guilt exceeded that of Israel in the north. For, not only had Judah enjoyed continued blessing and mercy withheld from Israel, it had witnessed Yahweh's retribution against Israel's idolatry and disobedience. And yet, for all this, Judah profited nothing, but became worse than her sister. If, then, Israel's fate was just, who could find fault with Yahweh for what He was about to do to Judah and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 23-24)? Indeed, if He relented from this punishment, He owed an apology to Israel.

There was no injustice in the Lord bringing the Babylonians against the remnant of His people, and He would not relent. Slaughter, destruction, desolation and exile were coming, but this wasn't to be the last word. Yahweh had ordained forgiveness, cleansing and renewal for His covenant people, and devastation for the cruel weapon He wielded against them. Thus Habakkuk had his answer: God was going to use Babylon to punish Judah, but this didn't mean He overlooked their wickedness and barbarity; they, too, would receive their just recompense (2:2-20; cf. Jeremiah 50-51). And what this answer required of Habakkuk (as the entire Israelite remnant of his day) was *patient faith*: They had to wait patiently for the Lord to fulfill His word, which would see them experience great suffering beyond anything they had known. All in Judah and Jerusalem would endure Yahweh's wrath, while few, if any of them, would survive to see Him carry out His judgment against their destroyers. And yet, even as they fell to famine, pestilence and sword (Jeremiah 21:1-10), were dragged into exile, or left to subsist as slaves in the desolated land (2 Kings 25:1-12), they were to hold tightly to Yahweh's promise that He would deal justly with all oppressors and restore David's house, throne and kingdom; *His righteous ones were to live by faith*, enduring their plight as walking with Him on high places (cf. 2:2-4 with 3:1-19).

The Hebrews writer was obviously familiar with this concept of the righteous living by faith (ref. also 11:7), but the fact that Paul also repeatedly referenced it suggests that it was part of first-century Judaism's theological perspective. Of course, these New Testament writers understood it *christologically*, but neither gives the impression that he was working with an entirely new concept. Indeed, a careful reading of Israel's scriptures shows that faith and faithfulness were the marrow of Israel's obedience, even as Torah established and defined the relationship between covenant Father and son. Torah obedience – “works of the Law” – was always a matter of sincere devotion, not outward observance (cf. Isaiah 1:1-13, 29:13-14; Micah 6:6-8; also Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10).

From the beginning, right relation with God (*righteousness*) was about faith and faithfulness. The one who is right with God is the one who trusts Him and His veracity in His words and actions, and so orders his life accordingly. This is the ethic behind Yahweh's word to Habakkuk, and so also behind the Hebrews writer's exhortation to his readers. Habakkuk's obligation to persevere in faith was relevant to these Hebrew Christians and the challenges they faced, but the writer had a larger reason for mentioning it. *He recognized that the promises demanding Habakkuk's (and Judah's) patient faith were the very ones God had fulfilled in Jesus. And that fulfillment, in turn, established another promise that called for the same patient and enduring faith on the part of his readers.*

The author saw God's faithfulness in Jesus as compelling motivation for his readers' bold confidence and perseverance. He who offered up Himself continues to mediate for His people as High Priest at the right hand of power, and this fact should assuage their fear and embolden their faith. But all the more so, because Jesus' continuing ministration is grounded in *promise*. It wasn't just that He'd carried them in their difficulties with lovingkindness and mercy. Such a disposition is well and good, but it doesn't *itself* engender confidence for the future. But the loving concern that drives Jesus' ministration serves the goal of the full realization of God's kind intention toward the creation He loves.

Thus Jesus' faithfulness to His people is His faithfulness to His Father's purpose and promise – the purpose and promise that He owns as being one with the Father. So it must be with *their* faithfulness, if it is to be genuine; they must bind themselves to what God, in Christ, has bound Himself to. *This, then, defines what it means for Christ's people to endure in faith, doing the will of God in the power of the Spirit with a view to obtaining what He has promised.* It isn't about obeying divine directives with the goal of a happy welcome into heaven. But neither is it submission to circumstances simply because God's in charge, or because of a hope that “everything's going to be okay.” No, the Christian's calling is to follow after Jesus' own faithfulness. It is the obligation to truly own in mind, heart, and manner of life God's own faithfulness; it is the obligation of *christiformity*: taking hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him, and pressing on toward the goal of the prize of God's upward call in Him. This was the writer's burden for this readers, and he was confident they would fully embrace it (10:39).