

Our writer is now giving some final instructions.

**1. Even in suffering Christian leaders are to be good examples to their people**

• *Pray and assist their suffering leaders*

• *Imprisonment and sufferings are not necessarily a disadvantage for the gospel*

**2. They are to trust in the constancy of the Lord Jesus Christ**

• *He will always be the same*

**3. Again our writer insists: they are to reject and refuse pressure to turn back to Judaism**

• *Jesus has replaced pre-Christian Judaism*

**1. Even in suffering Christian leaders are to be good examples to their people.** Our writer is concerned that we should learn from the examples of those who brought God's word to us, even when – and perhaps especially when – they are suffering. <sup>7</sup>*Remember the people who lead you, those who spoke to you the word of God.* It is often thought that this means the leaders of this community had died. Yet there is no hint of anyone having been killed for their faith (we recall Hebrews 12:4), and the date of the letter (before AD 70) seems too early for all of the leaders to have died. Verse 3 suggests rather that the leaders of this community were in prison. They are to pray for their suffering leaders, assist them when they can, and be grateful for their having brought the word of God to this community of Hebrew Christians. They are to reflect upon their leaders' faith, just as they reflect upon the faith of the Old Testament heroes. *Observe carefully the result of their conduct and imitate their faith.* If they watch these leaders they will see that honour is being brought to the name of Jesus, God is working all things together for good, and the kingdom of God is advancing. Imprisonment and sufferings are not necessarily a disadvantage for the gospel. Our writer is confident that if they watch their imprisoned leaders they will still learn much from them.

**2. They are to trust in the constancy of the Lord Jesus Christ.** <sup>8</sup>*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.* Our Lord Jesus is steady and faithful. If we have seen him **once** we may know that what we have found him to be, he will always be. Did we see him '**yesterday**' – in the Scriptures, in the way he has sustained the people of God over years gone by? He is still the same. Are we seeing him 'today'? Now in our present experience he is being good to us, and we are enjoying his faithfulness and his high-priestly prayers. But he will always be the same. It is not a temporary experience we are having. We are not 'lucky' that he is good to us today and facing the prospect that he might not be so good to us tomorrow. Goodness and mercy will pursue us all the days of our lives.

**3. Again our writer insists: they are to reject and refuse pressure to turn back to Judaism.** It seems from various statements in the letter that the persecutors of these Hebrew Christians were themselves 'Hebrews', and that life would have been easier for the Christians if they had been willing to take greater shelter within Judaism. If they had treated Jesus as only an angel<sup>1</sup> and had spoken of their admiration of Judaism as if Jesus had not **fulfilled** Judaism, then their persecutors would not have hated them so much. People were pressurizing these Hebrew Christians to support Judaism more visibly. If they will adopt a **Jewish** 'imitation-Christianity' with a lowered view of Jesus, then some of their troubles might be lessened.

But our writer says they cannot do this. It would be 'departing from the living God' to even try it. They cannot be 'old-style Jewish' and 'new-style Christian' at the same time. It is impossible. Jesus has upstaged and replaced pre-Christian Judaism. The Christian

<sup>1</sup> see Hebrews 1

• *These Hebrew Christians must live on grace*

• *No to ceremonial food laws*

• *Enticing – endlessly varied – but foreign to New Testament faith*

• *What is needed is not food regulation but a deeper experience of God's grace*

cannot stay within Christ-rejecting Judaism, nor even pretend to do so. These Hebrew Christians must live on grace not Jewish food-laws<sup>1</sup>. They must live on a different 'altar' from the one in Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>. They must be 'outside the camp' of Judaism not within it<sup>3</sup>. They cannot regard Jerusalem as their spiritual home. The sacrifices they offer are not literal but consist in spiritual worship<sup>4</sup>.



One obvious way of pretending to be more Jewish than they really were was to keep Jewish food-laws. But our writer says: *<sup>9</sup>Do not be led astray by endlessly varied and foreign teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who follow that way of living.*

The Christian churches are often enticed by teachings that come to us claiming to be Christian but to be some kind of improvement on the Christian orthodoxy of the past. They are endlessly varied, for they can never make up their minds what they believe as an alternative to true Christian faith. They are 'foreign', for they do not arise from the revelations in the Scriptures or from the teaching of the first apostles as we read them in the New Testament. Such temptations often come to us with a strangely attractive appearance and we tend to be 'carried away'.

These Hebrew Christians were being invited to show their Jewishness by becoming fussy about food laws. Our writer says: what we all need is not more petty regulations about food, but richer and deeper experience of the grace of God. He wants us to draw near to the throne of grace<sup>1</sup> and find grace to help in time of need<sup>2</sup>. He wants no one to fail to obtain the grace of God<sup>3</sup>. We find strength when we find God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ – and in no other way. All other offers are foreign to the gospel. More grace comes from the throne of grace than from a thousand minor regulations of those who would like us to be more Old Testament believers than Christian people living on Jesus.

1 13:9  
2 13:10  
3 13:11-14  
4 13:15

1 4:16  
2 see 4:16  
3 see 12:15

	<p><b>Dr Michael Eaton</b> is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisko Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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