

3. The writer's next exhortation reflects his letter's overall concern, namely the enduring faith and faithfulness of his readers. Their embrace of Jesus as Israel's Messiah brought on them the scorn and abuse of their Jewish countrymen, who were pressing them to renounce Him and return to the fold of Judaism, even to the point of openly persecuting them and seeking their harm. All of this opposition was tempting them to seek relief, and perhaps even question their God, His faithfulness, and their own faith in Him. This is the context for interpreting the exhortation in 13:5-6, which can easily be misunderstood as simply a warning against materialism and greed. But the writer's concern was more nuanced than that: *The issue wasn't greediness or desire for money, but the natural human propensity to seek relief and well-being through natural resource – to look for deliverance and security in things “under the sun.”* All human beings share this instinct, and thus it characterized Israel's legacy throughout its long history, as the people and their rulers continually looked to their own resources, other nations and even other gods to secure their well-being (ref. 1 Samuel 13:1-12; 2 Samuel 24:1-10; 1 Kings 3:1, 10:26-11:11, 18:1-28; 2 Kings 16:1-7, 17:1-4, 18:13-16; Isaiah 44:9-17; Jeremiah 2:1-18; Hosea 2:1-13; etc.). In this way they showed themselves to be children of the patriarchs, who themselves yielded to the same temptation (cf. Genesis 12:1-13, 20:1-11, 26:1-9, 32:1-8).

The wider context supports this understanding of the writer's meaning, but so do the particulars of the exhortation itself.

- a. First of all, he was speaking about an *overall disposition* or orientation, rather than specific conduct or actions. The Greek noun rendered *character* by the NAS (*conversation* in the KJV and *life* in the ESV and NAB) denotes a pattern, form, or manner that accurately and summarily represents or describes a person, thing, event, or circumstance. By extension, then, it speaks of the defining course or pattern of one's life. Such is the meaning in this context. *Whatever it is that the writer was demanding of his readers, it was to characterize the entire orientation and direction of their lives.*
- b. Secondly, the noun translated “covetousness” or “love of money” carries the same sort of life-orientation connotation. The term literally means *love of silver*, but it connotes a *grasping* approach to life; or put negatively, the absence of a generous or open-handed disposition. Covetousness is a common rendering, for it refers to a compelling desire for what one does not possess, and the writer called his readers to be content with what they have (13:5a). But the idea of covetousness comes short of the author's meaning in that it tends to suggest a materialistic, acquisitive orientation. That is, the “covetous” person is dissatisfied and restless, preoccupied with the “next thing,” and resentful of people who appear to have it better than he does. In contemporary usage, covetousness is associated with an unhealthy and sinful preoccupation with obtaining what one does not have, but this wasn't the writer's point. He wasn't speaking of dissatisfaction or resentment born of materialism and avarice. Yes, he exhorted his readers to be content with what they had, but in the sense of finding contentment in their *life circumstance* – being settled, secure, and at peace in the things that comprised their present existence.

*While it's true that Christians should be content with their material possessions and level of affluence, the writer was making a different point. **The contentment he called for has to do with finding sufficiency, satisfaction and security in the triune God and one's life in Him, rather than one's earthly circumstance.***

- c. The writer's two scriptural citations make this clear. The first captures God's personal pledge to His people ("He *Himself* has said") – "*I will never leave you, nor will I forsake you,*" and the second expresses their proper response to that promise: "*The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?*"

The first citation is interesting in that it isn't tied to one passage, and yet the writer introduced it as spoken by Yahweh Himself. It seems he was emphasizing the truth that these words lie at the heart of the scriptural message and its insistence on God's abiding faithfulness. This was Yahweh's solemn promise to Joshua (Joshua 1:5) and the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:1-8), and David later reiterated it to Solomon as he was preparing to transfer the kingdom to him (1 Chronicles 28:20). Here, the writer expressed it in the strongest, most emphatic terms, underscoring that what was true for Abraham's covenant descendents remains true for those who are his true children in the Messiah (Galatians 3:23ff). This promise consists of two parts, the first oriented toward God's *commitment*, and the second His *disposition* that underlies it: *He will never let go of His own and will never forsake them.* He holds tightly to His children, even when they try to wander from Him, and they need never fear that He will turn away from them.

The second citation (13:6) is the Septuagint rendering of Psalm 118:6, which expresses the appropriate human response to God's unwavering faithfulness. And that response is faithfulness *in kind* – faithfulness expressed in steadfast courage, assured confidence, perseverance, peace, and hope. Because God's covenant faithfulness (*lovingkindness*) is everlasting, His children refuse to *fear* or yield to *despair*, even in the deepest distress (Psalm 118:1-6). They find their sufficiency in their faithful God and Father because He is *for* them in a way that other human beings – even the greatest and most powerful – can never be (118:7-9).

Thus they don't grasp for other resource to deliver from their adversity and secure their well-being. Nor do they fear what men can do to them, for human power is limited to this life and its circumstances. Death is man's greatest weapon, but the God whose faithfulness is everlasting has pledged to swallow up death in life. The psalmist and his fellow Israelites lived in the hope of that promise, *but so must their faithful descendents who embraced the risen Messiah as the firstfruits of life out of death.* Jesus' resurrection is the proof of death's conquest and the guarantee of its final demise (1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 51-58; cf. Romans 8:12-39).

These Hebrew Christians had suffered much, and the epistle writer didn't suggest that things would get better for them. Rather, he exhorted them to live in assured hope without fear, having an open hand that finds all resource and sufficiency in their God who has proven His faithfulness by His triumph in Jesus the Messiah.