

- c. The writer wanted his readers to understand the critical importance of continuing with Jesus the Messiah according to the truth of the gospel as they had received it and begun their walk in Him (cf. Colossians 2:6-3:4). Whatever the forces pressing them to alter their convictions and faith in Jesus as Messiah, they must not yield to them, for the result would not be movement toward truth, but away from it. Jesus is Yahweh's "yes and amen" to all of His word and promises; embracing Jesus *in truth* is embracing Yahweh and His truth (cf. John 1:1-18, 5:36-38, 8:12-19, 10:22-38, 14:1-11). Retreating from Jesus, then, is retreat into *falsehood*. But for these Hebrew believers, retreating back to their former convictions and practice involved the falsehood of seeking to return to that which no longer existed – that which had passed away because it had fulfilled its role in God's purposes (Galatians 3). They may have been told that they could return to Yahweh by forsaking Jesus, but that would actually find them *condemning* Him as a liar. They would be denying His faithfulness in fulfilling all He'd promised; all that Israel had hoped in and longed for.

Falling away from Jesus, God's Son and Messiah, is analogous to receiving the life-giving rain from heaven and bearing useless produce from it – produce consistent with the creation's fruit-bearing under the curse of death (vv. 7-8). Such "fruit" isn't bad in the sense that it's unpalatable or overtly rotten; *indeed, it may be entirely appealing and appear wholesome and nourishing*. But it is useless because it cannot support or nourish *life*; it is the fruit that death yields. So it was for these Hebrews and all who bear the "fruit" of natural human existence under the curse; whatever their knowledge, piety, discipline, and success, their works are the works of death (Proverbs 4:12; cf. Luke 5:29-39; Romans 7:4-6). Life inheres in the Living God, and it entered the cursed creation in Jesus, the bread of life, flowing from Him to the creation through living union with Him (John 1:1-14, 6:22-33, 48-58; cf. Ephesians 1:9-10).

Thus the produce appropriate to the life-giving rain is *living* fruit – fruit associated with the renewed creation liberated from the curse of death. This is the fruit of *new creation*, which has its substance in the resurrected Messiah, the first-fruits from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Colossians 1:15-20). It is the fruit that Paul insisted consists in "faith working through love" (cf. Galatians 5:6 with 6:14-16). This, then, is the framework for interpreting the writer's affirmation in 6:9-10, and why the things he mentioned about his readers convinced him that they were indeed sharers in the resurrected and enthroned Messiah and the new creation in Him.

The pressures they faced moved the author to warn these brethren about the peril of falling away, but he did so believing that they would continue to stand firm in their faith and faithfulness. He wanted them to know that, and so reassured them that, despite his warning, he was "*persuaded of better things concerning them; things consistent with salvation*" (v. 9).

The phrase, “*better things*,” refers to what is objectively and intrinsically superior, not what is judged to be better based on personal perspective and preference. Such “things” are better because of what they are in themselves – because they conform to and manifest the truth. Here, these are things that provide objective, truthful witness to a saving union with Christ Jesus. Interestingly, what had convinced the writer wasn’t his readers’ embrace of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, but the way their faith in Him had been manifesting itself. *It was their work and its openly evident motivation that persuaded him, not their understanding and profession of faith* (6:10). And the writer wasn’t alone in this persuasion, but shared it with others who’d also observed this community of Jewish Christians (“*we are persuaded...*”). Even more importantly, the author was convinced that God Himself shared his assessment: *The things that had persuaded him and others of these Hebrews’ sincere faith were things that God – the God of Israel – had taken note of and would not forget.*

Indeed, the writer’s statement seems to suggest that his sense that God was pleased with their labors actually reinforced his own confidence in them: “*We are persuaded of better things concerning you... for God is not unjust to overlook your works and the love you have shown toward His name...*” This conjunction can convey various meanings, but here it seems to carry an explanatory sense that highlights two related ideas:

- 1) First, the writer wanted his readers to know that he wasn’t alone in what he saw in them; God saw the same fruit, and shared the same assessment of it. As much as another Christian’s approval can strengthen one’s confidence and resolve, it is nothing compared with God’s. And God issues His approval where there is conformity with the truth. Thus God’s approbation gave credence to what the writer and his associates perceived and concluded.
- 2) Secondly, God’s approbation (here implied in His justness to not forget) is the greatest evidence of one’s salvation, for He approves of those who embrace His purpose for human beings.

The author’s (and his associates’) persuasion came, not from the readers’ faith in Jesus, but their faithfulness, here described as the manifestation of their faith in attesting *works* and *acts of love*. It was what they did that persuaded him concerning their salvation, not what they said or claimed to believe. So the writer’s statement is liable to different nuances of meaning, depending on how the conjunction “*and*” is understood:

- 1) The most common rendering in English versions treats the conjunction as a simple copulative joining together the two ideas: “*your work and the love you have shown...*’

- 2) But a slightly different sense results from treating the conjunction as an ascensive, so that the second phrase acts to clarify and focus the first: “*your work, even the love you have shown...*”

With the first reading, the writer first mentioned his readers’ Christian labors in non-specific terms, and then took special note of their ministry to the saints (cf. 10:32-34). With the second one, the “work” the writer had in mind was specifically their loving ministry to their fellow Christians. (The KJV and NKJV have the phrase, “*labor of love,*” based on the Textus Receptus, but this reading has little manuscript support and is generally regarded as an addition to the original text.)

The overall form of the statement better supports the first option, but either way, the essential point is the same: *God took approving note of their works on behalf of His children, but as they were works expressing their love for Him.* Notably, the writer spoke of love toward God’s *name*, rather than toward God Himself. The two ideas are substantially the same since God’s name signifies His person, but referring to His name adds an important emphasis to the statement. For, in the case of God, His name underscores the *truth* of who He is (cf. Exodus 3:13-14, 20:7; Psalm 8:1, 9:10, 20:1-9, 33:21; Isaiah 51:9-15, 56:1-6; also Isaiah 9:1-6).

The “works,” then, that persuaded the writer of his readers’ salvation were their tangible expressions of love for God’s saints – His *holy ones* who bear His name as children sharing in His life. For this reason, these works were expressions of love for God’s *name*, which is to say, love for God according to the truth of who He is and what He has done. And because this truth is manifest in the Messiah and messianic work, love for God’s name implies a true and living knowledge of His Son. Demonstrated love for God’s saints, then, demonstrates love for God Himself, which love presupposes and reflects a true knowledge of Him. But because God is known in His Son, and fallen man has no such knowledge of Him, those who do possess it – and demonstrate it by their love for His saints – demonstrate the reality of their salvation (1 John 4:7-21). And this is the reason God takes approving note of such “works”: They affirm and testify to the truth and glory of His purpose and accomplishment in His Son.

In summary, these works were both attesting and commending because they were the fruit of renewal (new creation) in the resurrected Messiah; they were works that showed these Hebrews to be progeny of the Last Adam, the One who Himself is the first-fruit of God’s new creation. Thus they testified to the reality of a new human creature and new kind of human existence, one that is antithetical to the alienation, self-centricity, and self-enslavement that drive Adam’s children. No longer defined by the “procedure of the king,” they have become, in the true Image-Son, kings and priests to God in the way He purposed from the beginning.