

Introduction

- This whole book has been about keeping going...
- This chapter is rounding off that principle argument of Hebrews
 - chapter 13, which we'll look at next week, is - like many of the concluding sections of the NT letters - more of a mixture of the bits the author wants to include since he's sending the letter anyway
 - but here he is turning the attention of the Hebrew believers not just to his persistent message of "keep going", but to how their living will look if they are keeping going!
- That's the place of the "therefore" in v.12!
 - (YF - what do you do when you see a therefore in the Bible? Ask what its there for!)
 - the discipline with which God cares for us... where does that take us in how we should live?
 - its not just a way of reacting to circumstances
 - God has in mind a particular training regime
 - not one that is tied down in every detail for every person!
 - but there are key issues that, if God is to train us in righteousness, we will need to work through, allow him to shape our lives in
- God's discipline shows his delight, it is dependable, it is dynamic:
 - therefore do what vs.12-17 in particular say to work that discipline out in practice!
- Commentators reckon that something of the athletics image from the early part of chapter 12 is carried over to here
 - its a training programme!
- But I propose to do handle the passage out of order!!
 - taking 18-24 first - two mountains - contrast
 - which also builds towards practical holy living - a general call to which comes in 25-29
 - and then coming back to the more specific stuff in 12-17 at the end
 - (and we'll include some discussion of that stuff, as well as a straight forward sermon!)

Two Mountains (vs.18-24)

- If the mountain of the old covenant was impressive...
 - ...and it was!!
 - details: untouchable, burning with fire, darkness, gloom, storm, trumpet blast, thundering voice.....! (v.18-21)
 - literally awesome, signifying holiness (separate, other) - hence the unapproachability, fear, unbearable commands
 - even Moses, who met with God face to face, who if you like had a special relationship, the inside track - he trembled with fear (v.21)
- Then the new covenant is better!
 - notice difference in language to describe it
 - it is a place of joyful assembly - the CEV says "where the angels have come to celebrate"
 - its is where God's people, Christian believers, the firstborn are gathered
 - it is somewhere where you can come - even though God is there
 - what is the difference? For this is still the same holy God who cannot tolerate sin!
 - here in the heavenly Jerusalem is Jesus, the "mediator of a new covenant", here we are made holy and need not fear God's wrath
- We can come to the new Jerusalem, the dwelling of the living God, welcomed, at home, to a celebration:

- because of Jesus' blood that cleanses us and bestows on us our new citizenship

Living as you have become (vs.25-29 and 12-17)

- The argument then goes:
 - if its pretty clear we should obey the commands that came at the first mountain; that, living under that covenant, citizens of Israel, we should obey the commands that came as that nation was founded round the foot of Sinai...
 - then isn't it even clearer we should live now as citizens of the new Jerusalem, "not refusing him who speaks"?
- vs.26-27 are at first sight a little puzzling
 - and we don't know all the ins and outs of what the writer was thinking!
 - he's quoting Haggai 2:6...
 - (Hag 2:6) *"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (Hag 2:7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.*
 - the thought seems to be to emphasise the finality of Christ's completed work
 - its not just another stage in God's plan, this is it!
 - and in that context the therefore of v.28 makes perfect sense!
 - because we are part of the ultimate, final, completed kingdom, let us live as citizens of that kingdom - let us "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe..."
- Live as we are in Christ:
 - hypocritical not to!
 - Christians often get accused of hypocrisy... usually because we (they say) we talk as if we are good, but the reality of our lives doesn't match up
 - its actually the other way round!
 - maybe we can sometimes be accused of hypocrisy - but its because the reality of our life in the truest sense, our citizenship of God's glorious kingdom, doesn't chime with the outward things - our words, our actions - here on earth
 - we are sometimes out of step - but the real problem is when we are out of step with heaven our true home, not when we are out of step with earth!

Practical Application! (vs.12-17)

- In light of all of that we go back for a brief look at 12-17, and then we'll explore things further thorough discussion
- What does citizenship of heaven lived out on earth look like?
 - concern for one another - not solo Christianity! - vs.12,13
 - key things are community related!
 - Esau thing - he is the archetypal example of someone who put his own, transient personal pleasure before his spiritual wellbeing and heritage
 - hence link to the (sexual) immorality (Gk pornos)
- Citizens of God's kingdom, those who know and accept God's discipline
 - such as these will not seek to live as solo Christians
 - but will operate in living relationship with their fellow believers
- Let us, then, be those who are:
 - thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.' (v.28,29)

Discussion & Prayer

- Get folk into groups to do the discussion questions (mix-em-up?):
 - suggest everyone does the first question;
 - then different groups tackle 2/3/4
 - then each group look at question five
 - if you want to go on, then look at another of 2/3/4 that you haven't looked at already
 - if you are not sure what I'm getting at, or some of the background, then ask!!
- Take feedback... pray!

Questions were:

1. How do you strike the balance between (i) living in peace with all men and (ii) being holy? How have you experienced this tension? How did you resolve it?
2. How do we "see to it that no one misses the grace of God"?
3. How do we "see to it ... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many"?
4. How do we "see that no one is sexually immoral"?
5. Do vs.12-13 cast any light on your answer to 2/3/4?