

Privileged people should live in peace and purity - Hebrews 12:14-24
James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 20 January 2008

Hebrews 12:1-13 likened the Christian life to a race, a marathon. It's hard going at times, but the Christian must stay in the running. Today's passage is still urging the Hebrews – and us – to keep on going.

i Stand or fall?

v14 tells us that we need to pursue peace and holiness. If God is the God of peace, shouldn't you strive for "**peace with all men**"? If God is holy, shouldn't you strive "**to be holy**"? In actual fact, if you are not a holy person, you will not see the Lord.

v15 speaks of missing out on the grace of God. People do this when they refuse to depend upon and to respond to the God of grace. The writer of the letter does not want even one of the Hebrews to miss out. He wants them all to stand, not fall. What is more, he wants all the Hebrews to look out for one another. He wants them all to exercise oversight over one another so that not one of them falls. In the church, the many are responsible for the one. You need to keep an eye on all your Christian friends at Carey. Do you?

v15 tells us why this is all the more important. If we do not look out for one another, a bitter root might grow up and end up defiling many. According to **Deuteronomy 29:18**, the "**bitter root**" is a man or a woman who claims to be one of God's people but whose heart turns away from the Lord our God. We simply cannot afford to stand by when people who claim to be Christians live lives which are not Christian. If we do, their example will be contagious. And the church as a whole will suffer terribly.

Will we stand or fall? Take responsibility for your own spiritual progress. But take responsibility for the spiritual progress of everyone else here too. Do you do that?

ii Present or future?

v16-17 confront us with the choice between present and future. They point us back to **Genesis 25 – 27**, which are all about Esau and Jacob, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was a man of action; Jacob was a quiet man. But **Genesis 25:29-34** tell us how Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a single meal. Later on, Jacob gets the blessing which would have been Esau's. When Esau tries to get the blessing for himself, he can't get it, even though he cries aloud with great bitterness. Esau spares himself a bit of hardship in the present by getting a meal; but he throws away the future blessing which would have been his by selling his birthright.

Esau stands as an example of a man who preferred the present to the future, the material to the spiritual. And what happened to him? He left himself with a life of regret. The Hebrews need to think about his example and to persevere in following Christ.

There are many Esaus in the world today. Some non-Christians know the truth but reject it for the sake of an easy life now, so condemning themselves to a lost eternity. Some Christians leave themselves with a lifetime of regret by rash and sinful actions in the present (though they won't lose their salvation).

Thankfully, if you have gone your own way, there is hope. God is merciful. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die on the cross to save sinners just like you. If you come to Him, He will forgive you for your sin. So confess your sin to him. Trust in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. He will make you clean inside if you do that. He will forgive you. He will save you.

Present or future? Make sure you get it right.

iii Old or new?

Now we revisit some of the themes which we saw so much of in the earlier chapters of Hebrews. Which is the best? The old covenant or the new covenant?

v18-21 describe the old covenant and the way in which it was introduced. They refer back to **Exodus 19:16-20**. It's an awe-inspiring scene. But the whole picture is really one of separation. The people simply could not approach God.

v22-24 come like a calm after the storm. They give us a mouth-watering list of those we're in fellowship with as the people of God. If you're a Christian, you belong in heaven! You are in fellowship with the angels! You are part of the church! You are part of the family of God himself! You are a brother or sister of Christians who have gone before! And you are hand in hand with Jesus Christ, whose blood has pardoned you for all your sin. Isn't it good to be a Christian? Do you see how good it is to be a new covenant believer?

Old or new? The new covenant is better by far. It gives us such intimacy with God and with all those, angels and human beings, who follow him. So rejoice in your privileges. Think about them often. And persevere in following your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.