

## **The Passionate Pursuit of Holiness (Hebrews 12:14)**

Will you read with me together Hebrews chapter 12, verse 14. “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” The author of Hebrews from time to time makes a number of statements throughout the Epistle that are intended to get us to sort of stop and sit up and take notice and even take an inventory of where we are at, spiritually speaking.

He is writing to a group of people, some of whom were, at the moment that he is speaking to them or writing to them, considering going back to their old lives in Judaism under the temple and the sacrifices and the feasts and festivals and the Old Testament priesthood. Some of them were wavering and considering that, in order that the persecution that they were enduring would lighten up a little bit on them. He's writing to a group of people who had already had a number of people—we don't know how many, but obviously some—who had walked away from the faith and completely apostatized from Christianity and gone back.

And so he has these statements, these passages, which are intended to sort of take us up short and make us stop and consider, am I really in the faith? Have I merely made an external profession of faith in Christ, or is my profession of faith in Christ actually producing holiness in my life? Has it resulted in—has my belief in Christ actually brought regeneration? Or am I among those who have simply made an outward reformation of my behavior and conformed myself externally to the standards of this group of people to whom I belong, and do I really belong to them by virtue of the fact that I belong to Christ and because I am holy and I am in Him and these are my people and I have experienced true regeneration?

And verse 14 is one of those verses. We have seen, and we're on the cusp of—just about ready to get into—the fifth and final warning passage in Hebrews. And Hebrews is famous for those warning passages, those passages that make it sound like a genuine believer can lose their salvation and end up perishing, even after Christ has paid the debt for their sin and promised their glorification, that they can perish in the end. And the Hebrew warning passages are sometimes taken that way.

My take on those warning passages, as you have seen if you've been here with us from the beginning of Hebrews, is that those passages are intended to address those in the congregation who outwardly look like they are believers. They pretend to be believers. They even outwardly conform themselves to the visible body of Christ. But then

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something happens in their life, something comes up, and they, like a dog returns to its vomit, end up going right back to their life of sin and iniquity, going out from us, demonstrating that they were really never of us to begin with.

Outwardly moral, behavioral reformation is not the same thing as holiness. You see, verse 14 is intended to make us stop and to shock us. It's a little bit of cold water in our face. "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [or holiness] without which no one will see the Lord." You will not see the Lord if you are not holy. That's one of those statements that causes us to stop and say, now am I holy? Because morality is not holiness. You can be an outwardly moral person—never lie to your neighbor, mow the lawn of the little old lady next door, help a blind person across the street, work at the soup kitchen, reform your external behavior, stop your smoking, stop your drinking, stop your swearing, stop watching certain movies, conform yourself outwardly to a moral standard—but that is not holiness. You cannot have holiness apart from morality. Morality is an aspect of holiness, but morality and holiness are not the same thing. Holiness is so much more than morality. Though holiness includes moral reformation, moral conduct, moral behavior that is appropriate in the sight of God, morality and holiness are not the same thing.

So when I read in verse 14 that without holiness I am not going to see the Lord, that should cause each and every one of us to stop and say, now hold on a second, that sounds rather important that I be holy. So what is holiness? This sounds necessary. If I can't see God without holiness, I'd better figure out what this holiness is, and I'd better figure out exactly how much of it I have to have and what kind of holiness I have to have and how that holiness is produced in my life and what the holiness is that God is going to require of me. How do I get it? Do I have it? Will I have it?

There are two things in verse 14 that demonstrate just how important this holiness is. The first is the fact that you and I are commanded to pursue it. "Pursue peace with all men, and . . . [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord."

The second thing that shows us how important holiness is is that we are told that without it, you will not see God. That sounds pretty important. So our task today is to find out exactly what this holiness is, how it is achieved, and what this passage means so that we can make sure that we will see God.

We are commanded to pursue two things in verse 14. And the next couple of moments is just by way of review because we looked at part of this verse last week. We're looking

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at the rest of it today. We are commanded to pursue two things. First, peace with all men. That is an outward orientation that has to do with my relationship with others in the body of Christ, in the world, in the home, et cetera. The second thing is I am to pursue holiness, which deals with my relationship with the Lord. That's an orientation toward God. A holiness without which we will not see God.

So last week we looked at the passionate pursuit of peace, and today we're looking at this passionate pursuit of holiness. Notice the command in verse 14 to pursue holiness. We are to pursue it. Not just peace, but we are to pursue also holiness. That word *pursue* is used forty-five times in the New Testament. And again, this is just a couple of points of review. Thirty-five times of the forty-five times it is used, it is translated "persecute." It describes running after something, chasing it, pursuing it, pressing on toward something, striving after it, putting something to flight, pursuing it or hunting it down. The implication of that is that it is an intentional and deliberate and principled, knowing pursuit that occupies the mind, the heart, the affections, the will. It occupies us, and it is ongoing, and it is deliberate. It is intentional. It's not haphazard, it's not accidental; there is effort involved in this.

This is a work that we are called to do—listen—not in order to *get* saved, but because we *are* saved. That's a very important distinction. It almost sounds as if you and I have to work at holiness so that we will achieve some level of holiness and then, I don't know, a bell rings, an angel gets its wings, something happens, and we kind of reach that level where we get into Heaven. That's almost the way some people treat that verse. But that's not what's being described here. This is a work, a pursuit that we are to be engaged in, not so that we may acquire the standard by which we will be saved, but we are to pursue this because only people who are saved have the capacity to pursue holiness.

And you and I can expect a measure of success in this endeavor. This is something we are capable of. If you're in Christ, if you are a believer, this is something that you are capable of doing—pursuing holiness. We can expect that we could achieve these things—peace with all men, and holiness without which we will not see God. We should pursue in expectation that we will receive or achieve, at least in some measure, these things that the author is describing here. So this is not a fool's errand.

Let's describe holiness. What is holiness? You'll notice if you're reading the NASB that it says that you are to "pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." Now, that word *sanctification* sounds like it's very complicated

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and complex. You think, I need, I don't know, an evening course at a community college or some time at seminary to figure out what sanctification is. You don't. It's actually very simple. It sounds complicated, but it's not. Sanctification is holiness. That's a shorthand way of referring to that, which is why some translations translate that word in that verse as holiness.

The King James, for instance, says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." The NIV: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." The ESV: "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

That word translated holiness or sanctification comes from a family of words, a group of words, and they are all kind of related. They describe being set apart or separate, reserved for a special use, dedicated to a special use, something made holy or something that even is holy by nature, something pure or something innocent. There is a moral quality to it, as well as a nonmoral quality to it. So when God said to Moses, "Take off your sandals, for the ground on which you are standing is holy ground," He wasn't saying that the dirt under Moses's feet was somehow morally better than the dirt somewhere else on the other side of the creek. So it *can* have a moral quality, but it doesn't necessarily have a moral quality.

There's also the word that is translated "saint," which refers to believers. Now—be clear about this—the word *saint* refers to living or dead people who were or are believers. It's not just a word that describes dead luminaries that are canonized or given a special status by the church through some ceremony or outward public recognition. That's how sometimes we think of the word saint.

I am a saint and you are a saint. And I could refer to you as Saint John or Saint Mo or Saint Susan. You're saints. If you're in Christ, you are a saint. Living or dead, you are a saint. That word *saint* comes from the same word family as *sanctified*.

Now, let me ask you two questions, and for this I do want a show of hands. And I will warn you this is going to sound like a trick question. And I will tell you this is a trick question at the front end of this. So you already know that this is a trick question. But I want you to answer this question as honestly as you feel that you can, OK? I've given you all of that to prepare you to lift your hand.

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Here's two questions. First question: how many of you are holy? You would consider yourself a holy person? There's about five, six, seven. More hands are going up because peer pressure is working. OK, there's about ten people here, maybe twelve.

Now, maybe you were thinking to yourself, I kind of almost raised my hand. If he asked me that yesterday, I would have said yes. Today that guy cut me off on the way to church, so I won't say that today.

Second question: how many of you expect to see the Lord? Now that's quite a disparity, isn't it? We've got a problem, because only about twelve of you think you're holy, and yet all but about twelve of you expect to see the Lord. And this passage says that if you do not have holiness, you will not see the Lord. So we should probably correct something before we leave here today. And I will revisit these questions before I'm done this morning.

Now, perhaps you had an issue with how you would answer that question because you needed a little bit more information, namely what do I mean by holy? Now see, how we answer that question in our mind will determine how we answer the other question, are you a holy person?

There are three tenses to holiness. I'll walk you through these three tenses, and then we'll revisit that question. First, there is a past tense of holiness. We are made holy by calling. This is something that happens in the past at the moment of your salvation. So this is not future holiness or your growth here in this life. There is a past tense of holiness whereby you are made positionally holy because of what God has done for you in Christ. Namely because of what Christ has done you are called saint and you are called holy and therefore you are holy. At the moment of your salvation that is true.

1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified [The Corinthian church *was* sanctified, past tense.] in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." So Paul calls the Corinthian believers holy. He said, "You were sanctified" (past tense) and "You are saints"—remember that's another word for holy or holy ones. Same word family—and "You're saints by calling." Now, listen, if you know your New Testament, you understand that if there was any group of people in the first century that you would never refer to as saints or sanctified, it would be the Corinthian church. And yet the apostle Paul does that. He refers to them as sanctified, past tense, and as saints by calling. How can he call those people holy? And yet they were holy. Holy

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in what sense? Holy in the past sense. They had, at the moment of their salvation, been set apart for God, called saints, placed into the family of God. That is a past sanctification. We could even call that a positional sanctification. Positionally, in Christ, in terms of God's calling and His intention, He has set them apart as His own and made them holy saints by calling.

Then there is a future element of sanctification, a sanctification that will take place when we die and we are freed from our sinful nature. Our fleshly and earthly bodies will die with all of their sinful lusts, and the sinful tendencies and the sinful weaknesses that we have in these fleshly bodies, those will all go away and die, and we will stand in front of the presence of the Lord with unveiled faces and we'll see Him as He is. And we will be made fully and completely holy, entirely set apart, morally perfect, practically perfect, no thought of sin, no inclination of sin. I'm looking forward to that time when I can just think freely and never have to guard my thoughts, never have to guard my eyes, never have to check my heart, because every inclination and every motive and every desire is only holiness and never anything but holiness. My every reaction that will ever take place to everything that happens to me for the rest of eternity will be nothing but pleasing to the Lord and perfectly holy. That's future glorification, future sanctification, or perfect sanctification.

First John 3, verse 2: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be [made] like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). That word *purifies* and that word *pure* come from the same family of Greek words that describes holiness. That describes the return of the Lord. When we look upon Him, we will be transformed and we will become just like Him because we will see Him as He is. But the same is true if you and I die and go into the presence of the Lord. When we look upon Him, we will be made perfect, entirely perfect in all of our conduct.

The one who expects to be made fully pure, fully holy when he sees Christ, whether Christ returns or he dies and goes to be with Christ—the one who has that confident expectation in his future glorification, his future sanctification and holiness—will pursue holiness for his entire life.

Someday you will be made completely and perfectly pure, holy, blameless, and morally innocent and perfect. That is hard to imagine, is it not? It's hard to imagine. But for the one who is in Christ, that is what God has predestined you to.

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To summarize, there is a past tense of sanctification where you're called a saint and made a saint, set apart as God's own. Then there is the—and by the way, just a little bit of a sidebar here: There is an element of sanctification in the past that is tied to our election in Jesus Christ, when God, before the foundation of the world, chose us in Christ to be pure, holy, and blameless. There is a sanctification, a setting apart that happened back in eternity past before anything was created, before even an angel was spoken into existence. There is an element of our sanctification, being set apart, that happened then, but I'm not focusing on that so much right now. I'm focusing on aspects or elements of sanctification that we experience. I didn't experience my election. I wasn't there for it. He chose me in Christ before ever I was. But I experience the fruits or the results of that election, namely my regeneration and my adoption and my justification and being born again and my calling. Those are the things I experience. So for our sake today, past sanctification—when I or you got saved and we are put in Christ, we are there saved and redeemed, made part of God's family—that's the past aspect. The future aspect: full glorification.

Then there is today. Then there's today. Now, if you're in Christ and have been in Christ for any period of time, you're not what you were practically speaking at that moment. And you certainly are not what you will be, practically speaking, in the future moment. That “today” aspect of sanctification is what we refer to as progressive or practical sanctification. This is the process by which we are progressively made into the image of Christ, the process by which we are progressively freed from sin. Now, that happens over time. That is a slow and steady process that God does in the life of all of His children; every last one of His children, He sanctifies between the point that they are saved and the point that they are taken home to be with Him.

That sanctification process sometimes is quick, sometimes it is slow. Sometimes it is painless, sometimes it is agonizingly painful. Sometimes it comes with great difficulty and effort, sometimes it is almost effortless. But every believer is constantly being sanctified. I guess more practically it would be better to say that every believer is constantly moving either in the direction of holiness or falling into the direction of sin. But God, in the life of every believer, is drawing us inexorably toward what we ultimately will be in the final day when we stand before Him and see Him as He is.

Romans chapter 8, verse 29: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”

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2 Corinthians 3:18: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

Jesus prayed in John 17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

It is this transformation from the moment of our salvation to our final glory—that process, however long it takes, however long you live between salvation and your glorification—that progression in holiness is what we refer to as progressive or practical sanctification.

Now, how does this happen? It happens when we come to know the truth and we respond to the truth and we obey the truth and we apply the Word of God to our hearts and to our lives. When we deny ourselves and we do righteousness and deny our flesh and put off the deeds of darkness and walk in the light and in the truth. And we make our emotions and our minds and our hearts obey what Scripture says, and we deny our sin and our lusts, and we put on the new man, and we walk in the light and in holiness. This happens through the preaching of the Word, through our worship, our fellowship, our service to one another, through the reading of Scripture, through meditating upon Scripture, putting God's Word in our hearts, in our prayers, and in our minds, through meditation. That is how we are transformed or sanctified in this world. This is the means of growth.

And by the way, this is no secret formula. So if you came here and said, “Oh, the passionate pursuit of holiness, this is great. Now I've got a formula by which I can walk with the Lord.” The formula is simply Scripture. I know that sounds overly pedantic, but it's not intended to be. The question is not are you doing some secret thing to acquire holiness, but are you obeying the truth that is in Scripture? Or are you living in denial of that truth and in disobedience to that truth?

And by the way, concerning the Word of God, this event that we do on a Sunday morning from ten forty-five to twelve o'clock is group sanctification. Because as we come together here, we worship, we fellowship, we serve one another, we're bearing one another's burdens, we're visiting with one another, we're building one another up, encouraging one another. That's the whole point of a church gathering. And—this is the most significant thing—we are all sitting together under the preaching of the Word, so that as the Word of God is proclaimed, it's not just me telling you what to do, but it is all of us corporately as a body placing ourselves under the authority of Scripture and

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saying, “Here's what Scripture says. Here's what it means. Now, let's obey this and let's work this out in our lives.” This is group sanctification.

And you cannot habitually absent yourself from the means of sanctification and expect to grow in holiness. It does not work that way. You can't take it flippantly. You can't take it haphazardly. You can't continue to be disobedient. You can't absent yourself from the body of Christ and expect that the Spirit of God is somehow going to sanctify you and grow you in great leaps and bounds when you remove yourself from the very means that He has ordained and commanded for that end, which is your sanctification.

So this progressive sanctification begins at salvation and continues through the course of our life until we are finally at home with the Lord.

Now, which of these three tenses of sanctification are we to pursue? Are we to pursue past sanctification? Well, we can't do that because you can't pursue that sanctification unless you're saved. And once you're saved, you're already sanctified in the past tense sense of it, right? So you're already set apart and sanctified in that, so it does no good to pursue that. You're already saved. You already have that.

It can't be future sanctification. Why? Because you're never going to be perfect. And unless you're going to go drive your car off a cliff this afternoon, you can't really pursue that future glorification. God will bring it to you in His time.

Which means that the sanctification that you and I are to passionately pursue with intensity and determination and intentionality is our present sanctification. We can pursue growth and holiness. We can pursue progressive growth in Christlikeness. As we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ, become more and more obedient, yielding ourselves more and more, walking in truth and walking in light, knowing His Word, serving Him, denying ourselves, and choosing obedience, that is how we are sanctified. That is the sanctification that we are commanded to pursue.

So now let's revisit the two questions that I asked. Let me ask them in reverse order. How many of you expect to see the Lord when you die? OK, about the same as last time. How many of you are holy? Yeah. You're set apart, right? Now my work is done. We have corrected what was in error. But see, how we define holiness and how we think of holiness determines how we would answer what is now the second question. Are you holy? Are you set apart in Christ because of what God has done for you? Are you saved? If you are, then you're holy in that sense. And if you are, then you have—from the moment of your regeneration, you have grown or progressed in holiness at least slightly

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in this life, so that there is a difference between what you were when you were saved and what you are today. And there should be a difference between what you are today and what you will be five, ten, fifteen years from now if the Lord should tarry.

This kind of sanctification, this progression in sanctification, is what the commands of Scripture are aimed at. I'm going to read you a few of them.

2 Timothy 2, verse 19: “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’” That is a command to pursue holiness. You abstain from wickedness.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4: “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess. 4:3–5). Notice the distinction there between those who know God and those who do not know God. If you're pursuing sexual immorality, you're pursuing the same course, the same path, as anybody else who does not know God. And so, Paul says, the will of God is your sanctification. “And that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thess. 4:6–8).

Titus chapter 2, verse 11: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness [This is the wording of sanctification here. Denying ungodliness] and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people . . . zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11–14). His own people.

That's very similar to the language of I John chapter 3. We're not yet seeing what we will be eventually, but when we see Him as He is, we will be made just like Him, perfectly sanctified. And everyone who has this hope—the hope that they will eventually be made perfectly holy—will himself progress and strive in holiness, moving toward that goal. He will purify himself. Paul says we are to deny worldly desires and live sensibly, godly, and righteously in the present world, looking for the blessed hope and the

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glorious appearing of our great God and Savior. That forward-looking hope purifies the believer.

Romans chapter 6:

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. (Rom. 6:15–19)

Paul says the equation is very simple. You were a slave of sin. You have become obedient to righteousness. Now, just as before when you yielded your mind, your heart, your affections, your desires, your hands, your feet, and your eyes to unrighteousness to become the slave of sin, now, having been set free from sin as a believer, you do the exact opposite. Now you make your mind, your eyes, your heart, your will, your hands, your feet, and everything do the will of righteousness. Do righteousness so that you become the slave of righteousness. And if you submit yourself to sin, you become a slave of sin. If you submit yourself to righteousness, you become a slave of righteousness. Do sin's will and you will be in bondage to that. Do the will of righteousness and you will be in bondage to that. So make yourself, then, a slave of righteousness. There's no secret to that.

2 Corinthians 7, verse 1: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” God's purpose in your salvation is your sanctification. God could have taken you home the minute you believed and instantly glorified you. He did not. Why? Because He is

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doing something in you through this life, namely He is making you more holy. And He is progressing you in growth, in holiness, making you fit and ready to see Him.

So He commands us then to pursue holiness, to deny ungodliness, and to practice righteousness, to present ourselves as slaves of righteousness, to make no provision for the flesh, to deny our lusts of our fleshly body, to abstain from sexual immorality, and to pursue purity, righteousness, holiness, and godliness.

And listen, He empowers us to do this because He gives us His Word which informs the heart and the mind and renews us in the inward man. He gives us His indwelling Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of righteousness and holiness. And He has planted within the believer brand-new affections, brand-new desires, and He has given us a new nature. That is to say that everything is stacked in your favor to pursue righteousness. It's not like you have everything against you and you've got to do this all on your own effort. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Everything is stacked in your favor to be holy, to pursue holiness. God is training you for this. Does that mean that it's easy? No, it's difficult. I understand it's difficult. It's difficult for all of us. There's nobody in this room for whom holiness and the pursuit of it is an easy pursuit. It's hard for all of us, but it's possible for everybody who is in Christ. And not only that, it's demanded of us.

This is the race we run. Remember? We are pursuing something in the manner of a race. This is the race we run; it is the race of holiness. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Holy One who endured the hostility against Himself at the hands of sinners, and pursue, run, and chase after holiness.

And here's the good news. This is the very thing that God is sending discipline into your life to accomplish. This is the very thing that God is at work in you both to do and to will for His good pleasure. So God's intention in your life is to make you holy, to grow you in holiness, and to progress you in Christlikeness. That is why His eyes are fixed on you in this life. So since that is the case, you can pursue it with 100 percent assurance that having pursued it, God will create it and produce it in your life. This is what He is doing. He has called me to pursue the very thing that He is doing. So what do you think the chances of success are for those who will pursue holiness? It's a 100 percent chance of success. God will produce in your life—if you apply the means, walk in obedience to Him, God will produce in your life the very thing He has commanded you to pursue because God sanctifies all His children, and all of His children will have some degree of holiness before they leave this world.

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That's the kind of holiness that is described at the end of verse 14 [Heb. 12] when the author says it is without that holiness that you will not see God. Without that holiness, you will not see God. Now, when he talks about seeing God here, he is describing seeing God in a salvific sense because there is a seeing God that all people who have ever lived will experience. The unrighteous, the wicked, the unbelievers, they will see God. They will stand before Him. Revelation describes that One whom God has appointed as the judge of the living and the dead. He will take that seat on the great white throne and all the dead will stand before Him. All unbelievers will stand before Him. And they will be judged according to the deeds that they have done in their bodies, the deeds which are written, the crimes against Him that are written in that book. And they will hear the sentence pronounced, and they will hear their condemnation announced, and then their eternal damnation will commence.

So every last person who has ever lived, every unbeliever, even the worst of them, will see God, but it will not be a delight or a joy or a pleasure or anything that they are looking forward to. In fact, every last one of those sinners who right now is in torment is dreading the day when they will be resurrected in nonglorified but imperishable bodies and stand before the great white throne and hear their final judgment announced. There's not an unbeliever in Hell who is looking forward to that reprieve. They don't want to stand before Him. They don't want to confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and bow the knee and admit everything that they have denied and rejected and fought against their entire lives. They don't want that. So every unbeliever will stand before Him and see Him in that sense.

But only believers will look upon His face, and for them that will be blessing and joy and delight indescribable. Pleasure and glory and thrill and comfort and peace. It will be a love that is so palpable that they can almost feel it. It's almost a physical love, almost a physical, tangible, deep divine love that the believer will bask in at that moment.

But if you do not have holiness, you will never see that love. So he is not describing seeing God the way that unbelievers will see God, and he is certainly not describing here salvation by works, that you have to achieve some level of holiness in order to get in. What the author is saying is that these three tenses of sanctification that we covered earlier, they're all connected. Nobody who has not received salvation will ever receive glorification. And you can never receive glorification if you have not been first saved. And every person, *every* person, who will ultimately be made perfectly holy will in the

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present progress in that holiness. Why? Because they have been saved. And this is what God does in the life of all of His children.

So without holiness, whether we're talking about that initial holiness or progressive holiness, no one will see God. If you do not have in your heart, in your soul, a desire to be free from sin, a longing to be pure, a longing to be holy, a longing to be free from the lust of your mind and your heart and your eyes, a desire to be free from the sin in this world, if that desire is not in you, and if you can delight in your sin or the sins of others, and you do not long for the day when there's not the slightest corruption left in you, but it is all done away with, let me promise you something: You are not saved. You have no reason to think that you have been sanctified in any sense or that you will be sanctified unless you repent of your sin and you're born again and become a believer in Jesus Christ. This future glorification that we have when we see God, that is the portion only of those who have been saved. And that is the portion only of those who progress in holiness, because everybody who has been saved will progress in holiness.

One final observation. Notice that the text does not say “without *perfect* holiness, no one will see the Lord.” Notice that the text does not say that without a perfect track record of impeccable obedience in your Christian life, you will not see the Lord. Why does it not say that? Because he is not describing that perfect holiness that is unachievable in this life. And nobody, *nobody*, who knows their own hearts even a little bit, would ever pretend to be sinless in this life. We are well aware of our faults and our failures. We are well aware of the unholiness in our lives. We are well aware of the ways in which we disobey the Lord and neglect to do the things that He has commanded. We know those things. And when we are made aware of those things, we come back to the gospel, which says that my initial sanctification and salvation and my justification—my standing before God—do not rest upon my perfect obedience in the least, but rest upon the perfect obedience of another who lived in my place and died in my place, so that when I sin and I am confronted by that and I feel guilty because I am guilty and I have disobeyed the Lord, I come back to the gospel and I say, there is righteousness abundant for me in the standing of God, in the sight of God. I am perfectly justified, perfectly righteous. All of my sins have been paid for. There is no sin left to pay, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And because this is true, because my standing with God rests not on me, but on and because of another, because that is true, I can and I will deny myself, and I will walk in holiness because it is within my capacity to do that. My progression in sanctification is possible because of my positional sanctification. And it is my passion and desire because of my ultimate sanctification. God is disciplining us

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so that we may share in His holiness and so that He may produce in us the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

I want you to consider the thief on the cross. How much sanctification did that man receive in this life—progressive sanctification? Now, we know that he was positionally sanctified, right? He cried out, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). And Jesus said, “I assure you that today you'll be with Me in paradise.” Now, that indicates to us that he was saved in that moment. We know that he died, and now he is fully sanctified. How much sanctification was evident in the life of the thief on the cross? How much did he grow in this world? He never attended communion. He was not baptized. He never sat under the preaching of the Word. He never enjoyed fellowship with the saints, didn't discover his spiritual gift and use it in serving the body of Christ. He never preached the gospel, never went out street witnessing, never hosted a small group Bible study, never joined a men's fellowship, never exercised hospitality, never became an elder of a church, never did anything like that. How much sanctification did he undergo or experience? Matter of a couple of hours, wasn't it, between his initial sanctification and his ultimate sanctification? It was just a couple of hours. But consider this: in the matter of those couple of hours he stopped his blasphemy and he appealed to Christ. He stopped his cursing and he asked for the kingdom. He recognized who Jesus was and that He alone could grant him entrance to the kingdom. He defended Christ against the other criminal. He stood up to his former partner in crime and said, “No, this man is innocent. We deserve what is coming to us.” He understood his guilt. He understood that only the One on the middle cross could take away that guilt and grant him entrance to the kingdom. And he wanted to be in Heaven with the Christ who was being crucified next to him. So how much sanctification did the thief on the cross receive in this life? It was just a teensy-weensy little bit. It's only a couple of hours, but without it, he doesn't see God. Did he have initial sanctification? He did. And immediately his life was changed and he grew in holiness. And then he died quickly, but still he had sanctification.

So here's the warning: if you are not holy, you will not see God. And here's the promise: if Christ has saved you, you cannot fail to grow in holiness. So pursue it and chase it.

And now, here's my question: what is your plan for growing in holiness? What does it look like? What does your pursuit look like? Do you engage in the disciplines of your Christian life flippantly and sporadically, or as you have time, or when you get around to it, or when you think about it? Are you putting off sexual morality and purity until after

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you get married, or after you have kids, or after you graduate from high school or some point in the future? Do you approach this with a degree of seriousness? Do you pursue holiness like a hunter pursues his prey, or like a persecutor chases after the object of his persecution? Do you chase after righteousness like a runner running a race, with effort and focus and diligence, thoughtfulness and method? Are you at war with sin, or are you comfortably co-abiding with it? You'd better be at war with sin because sin is at war with you.

So you either pursue righteousness or you're pursuing something other than righteousness. You either pursue sanctification or you're going backward. Sin will be your undoing. So are you feeding your flesh and providing it the tools that it needs to destroy you, giving your mind and your efforts, your eyes and your heart and your affections over to the very thing that will enslave you ultimately and suck the joy and the life out of your soul and ultimately lead to your destruction and your ruin? Or are you chasing after holiness? The battlefield is your heart and your mind. That's the battlefield. And the tool is the Word of God.

So what does your pursuit of holiness look like? How passionate about it are you? How serious about it are you? Are you flippant about it? Here's the warning: without holiness, no one is going to see the Lord. So pursue it. If you're not in Christ, you will reject that command. And if you are in Christ, you will pursue obedience to that command.

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