

Dear Phil

HOLINESS OR HELL

Dr. Phil, Does Hebrews 12:14 teach holiness or hell? —Alana

Dear Alana,

Crucial question! Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

There are three things you need to know in order to understand what this verse is teaching: (1) the relationship between the word "holiness" in Heb. 12:14 and NT Greek; (2) what the words "holiness" and "sanctification" mean in the NT; and (3) the relationship between regeneration and sanctification.

The Greek word translated "holiness" in Hebrew 12:14 is *hagiasmos* (ha-gee-oz-móss). This word occurs ten times in the NT: Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Co. 1:30; 1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:2. *Hagiasmos* normally means "the condition of moral purity that results from being or living separated unto God from all that is sinful." In 2 Thess. 2:13 and 1 Pet. 1:2 it means "the act of separating someone unto God from all that is sinful with the result that they are morally pure." *Hagiasmos* is translated in the KJV five times as "holiness" and five times as "sanctification." Because they are translated from the same Greek word, they mean the same thing!

That brings up the question: "What do holiness and sanctification mean in the NT?" This question is much broader since there are at least four Greek word-groups that are translated variously "holy," "holiness," "sanctify," or "sanctification." However, the bottom line is still the same: In the NT, the words "holiness" and "sanctification" never refer specifically to entire sanctification unless they are modified by terms like "entire, complete, perfect, wholly, etc.," as in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. As John Wesley said: "The term sanctified is continually applied by St. Paul to all that were justified.... By this term alone, he rarely, if ever, means 'saved from all sin.' ...Consequently, it is not proper to use it in that sense, without adding the word *wholly, entirely, or the like.*"

The deeper issue behind your question is this: the words "holiness" and "sanctification" are regularly used in the Holiness Movement as synonyms for entire sanctification. This is a major problem for at least three reasons. First, this is not how the NT uses these terms. Second, using the terms this way leads us to misread the NT. For example, 1 Thess. 4:3-7 and Heb. 12:14 are regularly misused as texts for entire sanctification. In neither

case is the author talking specifically about entire sanctification.

Third and tragically, our non-New Testament use of these terms often roadblocks our drive to "spread Scriptural holiness." Why? Because Christians who hear us equating "holiness" and "sanctification" with "entire sanctification" go read their Bibles and can't see what we're talking about. As a result, believers who are sincere students of God's word wrongly conclude that since we use holiness and sanctification in ways the NT does not, our doctrine of entire sanctification must not be a NT doctrine. In other words, we mislead our listeners and hinder the spread of Scriptural holiness (which includes but is not limited to entire sanctification) when we refer to entire sanctification as "sanctification" or "holiness."

In conclusion, the answer to your question is that Heb. 12:14 does not teach that we will go to hell if we are not entirely sanctified. The word "holiness" does not mean "entire sanctification." On the other hand, Heb. 12:14 does teach us that we must be holy to see the Lord. "The holiness essential for seeing the Lord (Heb. 12:14)," Richard S. Taylor rightly explains, "is a state of rightness with God right now." In other words, anyone who is saved and walking in the light is holy and ready to see the Lord.

Are you pursuing peace with all men and holiness without which no one shall see the Lord?

Sincerely,
Philip Brown

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