



## Dear Phil

### PURSUING PEACE AND HOLINESS

***"In your article, 'Holiness or Hell,' you explained what Hebrews 12:14 doesn't mean—it doesn't mean that a person has to be entirely sanctified to see the Lord; he has to be walking in all the light he has. But what does it mean to follow holiness?" —Mike***

Dear Mike,

I'm glad you asked. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." To answer your question, we need to understand several things about this verse: (1) what it means to "follow," (2) what peace is, (3) what holiness means in this context, and (4) how Heb. 12:14 ties into the previous thirteen verses of chapter 12.

Although the verb "follow" sounds passive and lackadaisical, that is the opposite of what it actually means. The Greek word translated "follow" means "to seek or pursue aggressively." In other words, this verse teaches us that we must be passionate and fervent in our pursuit of both peace and holiness.

The word "peace" refers to a state of harmony and tranquility in one's relationships. Negatively, peace is a relational state in which there is no unresolved conflict or trouble. Notice that the writer of Hebrews said to pursue peace "with all men." It might sound odd, but God wants us to be aggressive pursuers of peace in all our relationships. No Christian should allow conflict to fester unre-

solved in his or her life. Just as we cannot love God without loving others, we cannot pursue holiness without pursuing peace with all men. If we are currently at peace with all men, we pursue peace by aggressively maintaining and promoting peace in our relationships.

In my previous article, I defined the "holiness" in Heb. 12:14 as "a state of rightness with God." Further study of Hebrews 12 has broadened and clarified my understanding. The first mention of holiness in this chapter occurs in Heb. 12:10, which tells us that God chastens us so that we may share in *His* holiness. The holiness in focus here is God's holiness. God's holiness is, negatively, His separateness from sin; positively, it is His purity, righteousness, and goodness. When we reject desires, attitudes, or actions that are sinful and choose those that are in harmony with God's word, we share in God's holiness. Thus the context suggests that the holiness we are to pursue is not "a state of rightness with God." It is much more than that. We must aggressively pursue sharing in God's separateness from sin and His purity,

righteousness, and goodness. We are to pursue being holy just like God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

It is a mistake to read Hebrews 12:14 in isolation from its context. Not only does the previous context teach us what the author means by holiness, it also shows us how we are to pursue it. After recalling the great heroes of the faith (Heb. 11), the author pictures the Christian life as a race in which we pursue holiness. He gives us six principles to guide us in our pursuit. We pursue holiness by...

- 1) laying aside any hindrances (12:1).
- 2) laying aside the sin that easily ensnares us (12:1).
- 3) fixing our gaze on Jesus (12:2).
- 4) persevering in the fight against sin (12:3-4).
- 5) submitting to the Lord's chastening and enduring it thankfully (12:5-11).
- 6) strengthening one another (12:12-13)

Before looking at these six principles, we ought to note that the writer's command to pursue peace and holiness does not imply that his readers were lacking these graces. As Gareth Cockerill notes, they had already "appropriated Christ's cleansing of their consciences (9:14)...and had experienced the transformed heart available through the new covenant (10:15-18). Yet, by the daily practice of concrete obedience, they must intentionally make this holiness before God...a reality in their conduct."

Next time we'll look at the six principles God inspired the writer of Hebrews to give as guides to pursuing holiness. ■

Sincerely,  
Philip

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