

What is Sanctification?
An Excursus from
A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews, Vol. 2
by Tim Hegg

“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”
(Hebrews 11:14)

Our author has emphasized the fact that God is a God of shalom, and in the closing salutation of the epistle, he will refer to the Almighty by that very Name (13:20). We have seen that Melchizedek is the “king of shalom,” and thus Yeshua, our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, is the very One Who has reconciled us to God, establishing everlasting shalom with the Father. Since, then, God is characterized both by His ability and willingness to bring shalom, we too must strive to be people who are known as those who love peace and strive to maintain it.

Our author may well have Ps 34:14 in mind as he gives this exhortation:

Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

סור מִרָע וַעֲשֵׂה-טוֹב בִּקְשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְּפֵהוּ:

ἐκκλινον ἀπὸ κακοῦ καὶ ποιήσον ἀγαθόν, ζήτησον εἰρήνην καὶ δίωξον αὐτήν.

The idea of “pursuing” peace (*diōkō*) pictures not only a desire for a personal peaceful existence, but also a pursuit of peace so that we can ourselves be a fountain of God’s shalom to others. Thus the exhortation in our verse is to “pursue peace with all people.”

At first glance this seems to negate the very thing our author is emphasizing in this context, namely, that we are to give all diligence to be faithful to God, which means living as He has instructed and standing for righteousness in a fallen world. Surely if we live righteously we may expect that there will be those who reject us and who even seek to persecute us, even as they did our Lord and Messiah, for He taught “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

But the point our author is making is that while we may experience persecution at the hands of those who despise righteousness and hate the God we serve, this does not negate our need to seek shalom and to be known as people who are at peace with God and therefore at peace with ourselves and others.

Note carefully how our author links the pursuit of peace with *the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*. This tells us that the shalom of which he is speaking cannot be established by setting aside that which God considers right and holy. The articular “the holiness” (*ton hagianmon*) should be understood to mean “the *kind* of holiness” which God accepts, i.e., a holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Now this does not mean that our eternal salvation is somehow won or procured by our own efforts in living holy lives. Rather, the holiness of life which pleases God is that which is the fruit of a changed heart—a life that has been born again through the power of God (cf. 1Pet 1:23). And it is this pursuit of living holy lives which establishes the peace which God ordains and which is therefore pleasing to Him. The peace that comes from God is not that which coexists with error. Yet the holiness which pleases God is that which honors Him and not that which is done to impress others.

True holiness, however, is inward and private, between a man and his God, and the good deeds which are its fruit are performed as secretly as possible as an expression of loving concern and an aversion for all fanfare and publicity (Matt 6:1–18). This kind of holiness, which reflects the pure goodness of God, springs from single-minded love of God, not from love of human applause, and is consistent with a longing to see the Lord, who is all-holy, not with a lust to be seen by men. (Quoted from Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1977], p. 536)

Thus, the sure proof that a person has been genuinely born from above is the fruit of righteousness evident in their life. This does not mean that perfectionism is gained this side of glory, but it means that when sin occurs, repentance follows and the resolve to turn from sin and pursue righteousness is ever present.

...without which no one will see the Lord. – This comes close in meaning to the words of Yeshua in the beati-

tudes: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). Our author uses the expression “see the Lord” to mean eternal salvation, that is, to spend eternity in the very presence of God, without any impediment to a full and unending relationship of shalom. In short, without the kind of sanctification that God desires, eternal salvation is impossible. Therefore, we know that sanctification, becoming more and more set apart unto God and from sin, is the inevitable result of our being saved by God’s grace through faith.