

Holiness

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[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to think for a little while this evening about this 12th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews at verse 14. Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. Now, in the first instance, of course, we have to, to an extent, qualify this last statement.

It's not that unless you're holy and faithful to the Lord, you'll just never see God at all. But rather, we will see him only in holiness will we be able to see him as he is.

1 John puts it this way, of course, in chapter 3, verses 2 and 3. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Now, what does that mean? Does that mean everybody else won't see him as he is? They'll see something different? No, but if we understand that how the rest of humanity will see him, will behold him.

[1 : 0 9] If we think in terms of when the Lord reveals himself, when he comes in the clouds of glory, for example, we read in Revelation chapter 1, verse 7 here, we see that it says, Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.

Even so, amen. And of course, in 2 Corinthians, in chapter 5, verse 10, we read that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

So whether we are amongst a reprobate and ultimately lost, or whether we are saved by his grace, everybody shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we will be judged according to our works, and we will be justified or not according to our faith, our faith in Christ.

But the sense in which without holiness we shall not see him, it is, as John says, we shall not see him as he is. We will see only him in the office of judge.

We will see him, as it were, in his office, in his power, in the task before him, the employment about which God will be about at the last day.

[2 : 3 2] It's rather like, you know, if you're at the state opening of Parliament, and you see the Queen and Prince Philip possessing him, and she's sitting there and reading all that our government plans to do, and year by year, this is what she does, you're seeing the Queen in state.

But those who are admitted into the royal family, or born into it, see her as mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, whatever it may be. They see her as she really is, behind the closed doors, not just the office, not just the pomp and the state.

They see the person that she is. They get to know her. And in this sense, I think we should understand, we shall see him as he is. But we won't be able to see him as he is unless we are like him.

The only people who see the Queen as she is are those within her family. And the only ones who will see the Lord as he is are those within his family. Those to whom he is not simply God, the judge of all the earth, but to whom he is Father.

Remember that there is much in the Scripture that talks about our seeing the Lord, about his own people seeing him. Revelation chapter 22, verses 3 and 4, There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.

[3 : 54] And his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. Now remember when the Lord revealed his glory to Moses, he said, You can't see my face, you can see the back parts of my glory as I pass by.

But nobody can see the face of God and live. But once we are in glory, death and sin and all the things of the world, we don't have to worry about it. We shall see his face.

Those who are redeemed shall see his face, shall see him as he is. That's again, going back to 1 John, that's when it says, Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.

But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Now as we've mentioned in the past, sons of God, it's not exclusive in the sense of daughters are in there, but it's in the sense that in this time and culture, daughters did not inherit.

Daughters married. They were married off into their husband's family. They would inherit whatever their husband was going to inherit. But daughters did not inherit, by and large, from their fathers.

[5 : 01] Sons inherited. And this is one reason why, whatever our gender may be, we are made honorary sons. We stand to inherit God's promises.

We are made the sons of God, and we shall see him as he is. Now if you inherit something, you don't do anything to earn it. Now going back to the example of the royal family again, if the next in line to the throne should inherit the throne at the death of our queen, whenever that should be, then it's not because of ability or gifts or because they're good at this or good at that, or they're earned by some kind of means of aptitude.

It's simply because of where they are born and they're lying in the succession. They inherit, regardless of whatever they may have done. And it's the same with an inheritance of money or property or whatever it may be, a house or anything like that.

If you inherit, it's because somebody has put you down in their will, in their testament. And where there is a testament, there must in necessity be the death of the testator.

The testament, the will, only comes into force when the testator has died. And the inheritance that we stand to gain, we stand to gain because in the Lord's, the Lamb's book of life, there are those named and elected of God from all eternity who stand to inherit because of the death of the testator.

[6 : 31] The testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And that is why we stand to inherit. We become honorary sons. We shall see him as he is.

But only if there be in our lives that holiness, full peace with all men, and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Now we think in terms of holiness, well that's what you've done for then, isn't it? Because I look at my life and I don't see much in the way of holiness. I see ordinariness. I see worldliness. I see one that doesn't give the Lord as much time as they should.

There's so much about the things of the world and business and everything crowds in. I know I don't think of myself as holy at all. And none of us does. And if we did, then probably we'd be even more in trouble.

What do we understand by holiness? Holiness means essentially devotedness to the Lord. Look at this context in which it is written.

[7 : 32] And we look back a few verses and we see what it says here. Verse 10. For they verily for a few days, thinking about earthly fathers, chasing us after their own pleasure. It doesn't mean they took delight in it.

But rather, there is a sense in which all of us, I'm sure, can think of occasions when our earthly fathers perhaps chastise us. Not necessarily thinking in terms of, oh, this is for his or her future good.

But rather because we have done something that really irritated or annoyed them. And maybe they lashed out a little bit. Maybe sometimes they, or perhaps we, if we are parents, in our own home have chastened or chastised our children.

Not necessarily in terms of what will be for their good, but because they have done something to make us angry. And that, of course, is something of an abuse of the parental state.

It is right to apply chastisement for the child's good and for their growth and for their guidance. It's not like just to indulge because we are feeling angry with them. No chastening for the time seemeth to be pleasant.

[8 : 33] But they, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure. But he, that is the Lord, for our profit, whatever the Lord does for us by way of chastisement, or by way of discipline or punishment, it is for our good, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Now, it's not exactly the same word in the original here at verse 10 as we have at verse 14. But it's the same sense. It's not that we're going to be like God.

Wow, we'll be divine. No, we won't be. But there is the sense in which the Lord throughout Scripture is saying, Be ye holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy. If you're going to be part of my family, you have to be like me.

If you're going to belong to me, you have to be like me. Now, in physical terms, in earthly terms, it would be quite normal if, say, somebody could look at any family and say, Oh, yes, I can see she's just their mother's daughter because of the physical resemblance.

Oh, he's definitely his father's son. Look at the pictures. Look at the way you can see by the mannerisms of what. You can see who their parents are. Maybe a hint of the grandparents are. They are like their parents.

[9 : 44] Or they may be like their parents in terms of character, good or bad. Some habits, some behaviors that you can see have been transmitted down the generations. They are like their parents.

If we are going to become like our Heavenly Father, then it means that the old nature is going to have to be more and more mortified.

That means gradually put to death. Put away so that it doesn't recover, doesn't come back. And the new nature, that which is from God's spirit, that which is from Christ, will gradually more and more take its place.

In a place I used to live before, then there was the grass that we had constantly cut year by year. Some of it was nice grass. Some of it was sort of weed infested or mossy.

And it really wasn't good grass at all. But you still cut it. And one of the ways in which we managed to get better grass in there was that somebody allowed us, with a patch of ground we were clearing, to dig out squares of turf.

[10 : 50] Nice, good, lush grass. Dig out the squares of turf. Dig out a patch of the old rubbishy moss and thin soil. Chuck that away and put in the squares of good grass so that amongst all the rubbishy grass there would be a lovely patch of nice green grass there.

Because we had taken out what was old and rubbish and put in what was good and new. It wasn't native to that chunk of ground, but it soon bedded in.

And it soon became part of it. And it soon began to look very different. It's all a yellowy set of minty grass round about and then this lovely patch of green which had been transplanted and plunked in there.

And it became good. And likewise the Lord plants within our hearts that which is from Him. Transplanting His grace, His holiness bit by bit.

Sometimes digging out the old unproductive self. And saying in other times it's a gradual ongoing spreading warfare. As the old spirit of the world fights against the new spirit of grace.

[11 : 56] But gradually it is always ever going to weaken. And if the Lord is truly in our hearts He is going to win more and more. That we might be partakers of His holiness.

Now often in scripture what is the opposite of holiness devotedness to the Lord or sanctity is the term profane. Now we tend to think in terms of profane or profanity as swearing or as blasphemy or as bad language or things like that.

Where the Bible uses the term profane or at least the authorised version uses profane it doesn't necessarily mean that which is bad and evil and worldly and unclean. But rather as Ezekiel in its latter chapters makes clear that the priests of the Lord are to make a distinction between the holy and the profane.

That is that which is set apart to the Lord and that which is simply ordinary of the world. And we've got an example of this further down here where it says Looking diligently lest any man fail Verse 15 of the grace of God Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled We'll come back to that verse in just a minute because that's significant too.

Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. Now in all fairness to Esau we don't have any record of his being a fornicator unless you count bigamy as a sort of inappropriate relationship which of course it is.

[13 : 27] But he's not guilty as far as we know of transgressing out with the bounds of his marriages. As we looked at this morning Esau took two wives right away Canaanite women bad choices grieved his mother and father but fornication that's not necessarily what he's guilty of but it's not Esau who's described as the fornicator It says lest there be any fornicator or profane person such as Esau Now what did we say about Esau this morning?

We said not that he was setting out to annoy his mum and dad not that he thought how could I really bug them these people who are so into the covenant of grace I know I'll go and get a couple of pagan wives and that will really irritate them He's not setting out to do that any more than he is setting out to throw over his birthright for a mess of pottage It's just that he doesn't care It's just that he doesn't cross his mind All that is in his mind and thoughts is the ordinary everyday things of the world He wants to take a wife so he doesn't goes and does it He doesn't think about the covenant He doesn't think about the Lord He just goes and takes a wife In fact two are better than one so he goes and takes two He doesn't ask his parents He doesn't think about the relationship with the Lord or his responsibilities as the eldest of the patriarch's sons and what his responsibilities would be He just goes ahead and does it This profane person who has the world in his heart

Not that he is any more bad than anybody else David had at least eight wives Okay, he sinned in particular ways but he was the beloved of the Lord So it's not that in and of itself which is the thing It's just that David was the man after God's own heart and he saw as a man for whom the world was just everything He was profane He was the opposite of that which is holy He was not in any sense set apart to the Lord He was rather completely given over to the world In the sense as it says here For one morsel of meat sold his birthright Birthright, not tangible You can't put your hand on it It's not like a lump of gold It's not like a bowl of food It's not like a kill in the hunt It's not like something that you can say This is mine It's something that's sort of in the air You can't pin it down You can't nail it to the ground You can't put it in a bag and say This is mine It's one of these intangible things

So of course you can trade that and get something solid some food for it because hey this is real this is tangible this is going to make a difference to me right now But not think in terms of what about eternity What about tomorrow What about the rest of your life What about what you have lost What should profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul This is what Esau is about That which is profane That which is simply of the world Not that he's more evil than anybody else It's just that the Lord of eternity and the things of the Spirit and above all the things of holiness simply don't register at all They are just not there And you know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing He was rejected He found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears He wanted to turn the club back but it was too late then He got his mess of potage

He eaten it It was done It was gone He couldn't now trade back again There was nothing to go back with Now when it says Verse 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God Any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby may be defiled It's an indication not only of how a root then grows and spreads but all this this isn't just a comment this is a quotation Remember that this is the letter to the Hebrews Jewish Christians people who are themselves steeped in the Old Testament scriptures and likewise the final verse Our God is a consuming fire These are not comments These are quotations and it is likely that the Hebrew readers would have known of them Deuteronomy 4 at verse 24 We read here For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire even a jealous God The final verse of this chapter it's quoting

[18 : 01] Deuteronomy 4 verse 24 Likewise the root of bitterness Deuteronomy 29 at verse 18 It says Lest there should be among you man or woman or family or tribe whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God Now that's essentially what again prophyl is Having known something of the Lord which Esau would have done You know if you're growing up with Isaac and Rebekah you're going to be trained up in the ways of the Lord You're going to be present when the Lord is worshipped at times of sacrifice and family worship and prayers and so on He would have known and been exposed to the God of the covenant to the God of Abraham and Isaac the God of his people and yet He just turned away from that back to the world which seemed more real So if there be any root of bitterness any man or woman or family or tribe whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of these nations lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood again that's where the quotation comes from going to serve other gods what is that but the idols of this world what is an idol except that which we make more important than God we think in terms of idols just be oh that's like all the sort of graven images like Hindus have or the medieval church and Catholicism and all that well that's what that's what idolatry is statues of the

Virgin Mary and the saints and all that sort of thing these are just images yes but the idolatry consists in worshipping at the feet of these things in place of worship of the true God who says that we are to worship him in spirit and in truth and not by any form or image which is forbidden of course in the ten commandments and Jesus never changes those commandments so idolatry is not making images similar idolatry is making something else more important than God it is the opposite of holiness holiness is single minded devotion to the Lord that whatever else we do the Lord comes first now this sense of single mindedness of course Jesus makes reference to it in the Sermon on the Mount where he says in chapter 5 of Matthew at verse 8 at chapter 6 of Matthew where he talks about the eye being single he says the light of the body is the eye if therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light but if thine eye be evil the whole body shall be full of darkness if therefore the light that is in thee be darkness how great is that darkness so what does he mean by that it doesn't mean thy eye be single in other words you're sort of side-clops only got one eye or you're blind in one eye therefore thy eye is single no it means that if what you are seeing ahead of you if what you see in your life you are looking at is single mindedly focused upon that which is the Lord then thy whole body shall be full of light if thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light focused upon the one thing needful that if thine eye be evil turn away from the Lord if you turn away from the light you're looking into the darkness now sometimes you know perhaps if you think in terms of again if you're camping or something like that and it's bits black and the wee campfire that's the only source of light and if you were coming from some distance away you'd see this wee pinprick of light but if you've been sitting round the fire and then you turn away into the tents or whatever then suddenly everything's very very black by comparison it's like when you when you come out of a well lit room and then you go into the corridor whenever there's no lights on it's really black as if by comparison with the bright light so when you turn away from the light of the world you must be turning into the darkness you must be turning towards the evil if thine eye be evil then thy whole body shall be full of darkness if what even you are focused upon is simply that which is dark in itself that your whole body your whole being is going to be filled with that darkness whatever you make your idol whatever you make your god that will enter into you whatever becomes your be all and your end all it may be your hobbies it may be your job it may be your relationships whatever it is then that becomes the most important thing in your life and you may say oh yeah but I want god as well you know I want the lord and I want that in it's proper place and pigeonhole but you this is the main focus of my life then that becomes your god that becomes the supreme being in your life and at the end of the day god gives us exactly what we desire he will give you that for perhaps all of your life and then it will end and then what it cannot save us whatever it was it will not redeem our souls what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own souls follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the lord now this holiness of course is not an easy thing to do it's not easy to be focused purely upon the lord if we're going to be focused on the purely on the lord we're going to have a pure heart that's what Jesus says that's what the reference I was going

to make earlier matthew 5 verse 8 blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see god in other words they will see him as he is like we looked at the four in first john in chapter 3 they shall see him as he is the pure in heart who desire the lord above and beyond all else they shall see him they shall see him as he is psalm 17 says as for me verse 15 i will behold thy face in righteousness i shall be satisfied when i awake with thy likeness and we might think well to be focused holy on the lord that's that's not an easy thing to do you know particularly if it means following peace with all men some of whom are against us some of whom are persecutors we'll come to that in a minute but first of all i want us to recognize that god is no man's debtor if we are focused wholly upon the lord which is another sense in which holiness is applied that which is wholly given to something if we are wholly given to the lord it doesn't mean that we're supposed to lock ourselves in a monastery or a convent and just just just do religious services the whole time it is rather that every aspect of your life your ordinary work your food and drink your money your home your family your life all that you do is done under the power of god and with reference to god and recognizing that we receive all these things from god with regular thanksgiving to god with all the way that we administer all these things is through what god has revealed to us everything is from god and offered back to the lord god is in every aspect of our life and he is the most important aspect of our life it's not that you have to give it all up and you're never going to have any fun or never have any joy never have any goodness in your life god is no man's debtor and here's something mostly you'll be aware that we're recently on a trip to london and one of the things that we saw when we're down there was hms belfast some of you know hms belfast is tied up in the thames there just just below tower bridge and it's been there since like 1971 it was commissioned in i think 1938 or 39 and it was probably an active service for like 30 odd years and it's been sitting as a sort of living museum piece for like 40 years plus so what we saw around hms belfast all the different rooms you know the little hospital section and the kitchens and the men's living quarters and the chapel that they had and the communications room and every aspect engine room and everything else and one of the things that's that struck me afterwards was after being down in the engine rooms and they would simulate the noise of it and all the metal around you and all the wheels and the engines and everything and then your meals in the cafeteria place and the food didn't look very appetizing but i suppose you know you can make it more nice if you wanted so never mind that the sleeping quarters how little time would be actually out on deck taking in as it were the sea and the fresh air and everything how little time would be actually breathing the clean air or taking in the factory and see how much of your time you would be effectively living in a shipping container living inside a metal box with permanent noise permanent crowding very little fresh air or outward view or any sense there was something like 900 they said of a crew in HMS Belfast and the school we staffed and the prospect of being crammed in a ship it's longer than say you know the sea fourth or something like that but much narrower the prospect of being crammed in there nearly a thousand people

and i thought to myself all my life when i was young that was my big ambition was to go to sea and the lord did not allow it and the lord prevented that from happening and i wanted to be at sea i wanted to be well a merchant neighbor royal neighbor whatever i didn't mind i thought this is what i wanted my whole life and i came away off HMS Belfast thinking yeah fantastic brilliant wonderful ship admire the people who served in it but oh boy i would have been so claustrophobic on a ship i'd see i would have been so boxed in i would have been so irritated by the endless noise and the constant cheat by jowl living amongst people and i would have been heaving out there on the high seas that's before you throw in the fact of active service and guns going off and people trying to sink you and all the rest of it and i walked back off the plank thinking okay lord it may have taken like 35 years for me to recognize it but looks like you knew best looks like you were right after all what i thought i wanted the lord knew this is not going to work for you at all this is going to be even if you succeed in doing it you are going to hate it so many years of your life will go down the pan because you threw yourself into something you knew nothing about and you thought this would be for the best it didn't take long to show me james how wrong i would actually have been not that i love being at sea but the idea of living constantly in fact confined enclosed metal boxes cheat by jowl with hundreds of other people unable to prick barely breathe unable to have any space of your own unable to do anything really without constantly being compressed and enclosed and the noise and all the orders you get and so on i just don't know this is this is not what i would like the lord knew best and the life the lord sent me into ends up being far more for me blessed enjoyable full of joy full of all the things that i would seek and desire he knew far better than me some of you all have heard the uh the illustration that the missionary wilk urk has used in the past how when he was young he desperately wanted a motorbike and how he from his early jobs he saved up his money and he saved up his money and then he had enough for a motorbike and he was so looking forward to buying this motorbike and just as he was about to there was a missionary meeting and he went along through it and uh and they said how they were desperate for funds and they needed this this help for this missionary going out to whatever country it was and of course he went away with guilt really dragging him down he thought here i have this exact sum of money all saved up for something i want for myself and here they're needing it for the lord's cause oh no what should i do and he probably hated himself as he was doing it but he gave it to the lord and cleared his conscience but no doubt broke his heart and then a few years later different job moved further on and he had again saved up enough for the motorbike and there he was definitely always going to get the motorbike and then that's just when the lord began to strive with him in his heart and to lead him into missionary service overseas and he thought this money that i've saved up it's going to have to go for my period of studying for the mission field i'm going to have to use it for all my daily expenses and like there goes my motorbike and then it went again and you might be thinking well this really doesn't help serving the lord you just lose the whole time don't you so he was sent out to burkina faso upper volta as it was then and he was sent to be in charge of a number of outlying mission stations and what did they give him to keep in touch with all the different mission stations but a motorbike a motorbike to go from one mission station to the other to take the lord's services to encourage the lord's

people to go on the rough tracks and the wild roads in burkina faso and to rev up all the distance you would want and to feel all the freedom that he would have wanted out in that foreign country god gave him what his heart's desire had been but he did it serving the lord and he did it having been willing to lay down what he thought he wanted for the lord now either we lay it down willingly like he did or we lay it down unwillingly like i did before when i was young but one way or another the lord always always gives more than he ever takes he always gives us our heart's desire but he does it in such a way as puts him first and takes from our lives that which is the best to be given to the lord because god is no man's debtor and he requires of us to be wholly devoted to him you see often particularly when we are young we may be inclined to think well if i give myself the lord if i give my life to the lord then you know i'm gonna lose i'm gonna i'm gonna fail all the things i want to do i'm not going to be allowed to do i'm not going to be able to do god sees and knows what it is that you desire and sometimes he will find a way of giving you that like he did with wilford but there and still able to serve him and sometimes he will just stop it from happening like he did in my own case but show us maybe years later this is what is best for you you would not have been happy or good or blessed in what you thought you wanted the lord knows best the lord knows what is best for our lives and for our hearts and you know what if we follow the lord then we are never the worst off it sam 37 talks about this it says you know i have been young and now old yet have i not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread he is ever merciful and lendeth and his seed is blessed depart from evil and do good and dwell forevermore i've been young now i'm old i've never seen the lord let down his people it's not that we ourselves are righteous but if we are given to the lord if we are devoted to the lord then his righteousness is made to be ours we dwell under cover of his righteousness follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the lord it is not easy to follow peace with all men when the world is against you when the world will always be against the lord's people when it will always be seeking to oppose the gospel to oppose christianity but we are not our own we are bought with a price therefore glorify god in your body paul next to the corinthians and in your spirit which are gods and it says also that timothy jay and all that will live godly in christ jesus shall suffer persecutions so we shouldn't expect life is going to be easy or the ability to get on with other people if they are against the gospel or against us for being the lord's then that is not going to be easy it is going to take a supreme act of god's grace to live at peace with those who want to be at enmity with us but what we are to do is to make sure that nothing that we do in our own human nature provokes their enmity let it be the offense of the gospel and not the offense of our character or our nature jesus said in the world you shall have tribulation but then he said be of good cheer i have overcome the world wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees make straight paths for your feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way but let it rather be healed the sense there

[35 : 34] is of of an injury of that which is you know an ailment which needs to be healed how do you heal let's see to do a dislocated foot or leg or knee well you give physiotherapy and they want to give you physiotherapy what do they do they send you up the clinic or do they say no walk along the ward for a wee bit take the zimmer to begin with then take a stick after that which is a bit stronger two sticks to begin with then one stick and then gradually as you walk and walk and walk on the flat then you go up and down the stairs a wee bit gradually you build up your strength this is the sense here of that which is lame or that which is dislocated or that which is injured in some way exercise it make the straight paths for it walk on the flat then walk on the stairs then build up the strength that it be healed and in that sense gradually build up the strength living at peace with all men don't provoke the world but try to live at peace with all things you can do anything to appease the world except soon you must never give in to its demands to let go of god god first and then your neighbor after that follow peace then with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the lord we shall not see him as he is unless we are to be like him and we will not be like him unless we are wholly given to him holiness wholly devoted to the lord why are we to give that much to him because he gave his all for us and he would have us to be like him and he laid down his life that men who were his enemies might be saved and redeemed and therefore even when men are at enmity with us we are to follow peace with them and holiness without which no man shall see the lord let us pray