

HEBREWS 12:14: A TEST CASE FOR THE RUN-FOR-THE-PRIZE VIEW

JOHN NIEMELÄ,

Professor of New Testament
Rocky Mountain Bible College and Seminary
Denver, CO

I. INTRODUCTION

Gabriela “Gaby” Andersen-Schiess represented Switzerland in the women’s marathon at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. Only 400 meters remained in her race as she stumbled into the stadium. Her right leg seized and, with a twisted torso and limp left arm, she staggered. Some cheered for her; others pled for officials to pull her from the race. She refused medical attention, because that would disqualify her. Continuing perspiration proved that heat stroke had not begun, so medical personnel let her hobble forward for an agonizing five minutes and forty-four seconds. Eventually, she fell across the finish line. She was fine again within two hours.

Why did she endure such agony? Did she fear losing her native-born Swiss citizenship for failure to finish? Would she face a firing squad for quitting? Would she owe a fine for an incomplete race? No, she finished for a sense of national and personal accomplishment.

Through the use of *we* and *us*, Heb 12:1-4 urges believers to join the author in completing the Christian race:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the

shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

What is at stake in this race? Context argues that eternal reward is the issue. Unfortunately, many understand Hebrews to restrict the possession of everlasting life to those who finish the race, that is, to those who persevere in faith and good works to the end. Under that view the author is threatening his audience with eternal condemnation: Run for your lives, because you will perish eternally if you do not finish the race. The opposite is actually true. The author of Hebrews actually assures his readers, whom he calls “holy brethren” (3:1; cf. 10:19) and “beloved” (6:9), of their possession of life that can never be lost (Heb 10:10, 14). While he does warn them, the warning about not finishing the race concerns missing out becoming Christ’s partners (*metochoi*) in the life to come, not being in His Kingdom. Not all people in the Kingdom will be partners in Christ. That privilege is earned by enduring to the end of the race.

II. TWO WAYS TO VIEW HEBREWS: RUN FOR YOUR ETERNAL LIVES VERSUS RUN TO BECOME CHRIST’S PARTNERS

Schreiner and Caneday, co-authors of *The Race Set Before Us*,¹ construe Hebrews as *running for one’s life* to prevent going to the lake of fire. They view everlasting life as the *prize* for which believers must run. They acknowledge that people often characterize their view as salvation by works, a charge that, in my opinion, is valid.

¹Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

Throughout this book [*The Race Set Before Us*] we have maintained that we must run to win the prize of eschatological salvation. Those who give up in the race will not inherit the kingdom of God [that is, they will not enter God’s kingdom]. Some object to the thesis we advance by claiming that it smacks of works-righteousness.²

The authors admit that their view sounds like obtaining eternal life through righteous human works. They attempt to deflect the works salvation charge by claiming fidelity to the argument of Hebrews:

We reply that *our conception of the race is no different from that of the author of Hebrews*, who exhorts the readers not to “throw away your confidence” since “it will be richly rewarded” (Heb 10:35). The author then says, “You need to persevere in order that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He promised” (Heb 10:36). What is the reward and the promise that is placed before the readers here? The reward is given when Jesus comes to those who live by faith and do not shrink back from their confession (Heb 10:38-39). Hebrews 10:39 clarifies that *the reward is eternal life*: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved” (NIV) . . . Thus the author summons the readers to belief unto final salvation. If they quit the race at this juncture, they will not be saved.³

The false syllogism below shows their attempt to evade the charge that eternal life comes through works:

Major Premise: The author of Hebrews did not advocate works salvation.

Minor Premise: *The Race* is faithful to the argument of Hebrews.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 312ff., emphasis added. Space prohibits rebutting their premises in Hebrews 10. However, cf. Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews, Part 4: The Danger of Willful Sin in Hebrews 10:26-39,” *BibSac* 145 (October-December 1988): 410-19.

Conclusion: *The Race* does not advocate works salvation.

The minor premise is false, thus producing a false conclusion. Schreiner and Caneday misconstrue Hebrews' warnings to eternally secure believers that faithful living is required to receive eternal rewards. They misinterpret it as if it made faithful living a prerequisite to receiving eternal life. The charge of works salvation is a valid complaint against their book.

The Race attaches foreign meanings to rewards language (as if avoiding the lake of fire were a reward). Consider as a test case Heb 12:14: *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*. Schreiner and Caneday's understand it this way:

Nor is growing in grace optional.⁴ The author of Hebrews says, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14 NIV). Holiness [in lifestyle, e.g., growing in grace]⁵ is necessary to see God, that is, to experience [that is, to obtain]⁶ eternal life.⁷

That citation has the earmarks of a salvation by works righteousness. At another juncture, Schreiner and Caneday reinforce the initial impression of salvation by works righteousness:

We are justified in portraying the journey of faith as a marathon race, for the writer of Hebrews thinks of the Christian life as a race in which perseverance is needed. Indeed, in the succeeding verses (Heb 12:3-11) the writer teaches that the

Christian life is comparable to the discipline that children receive from their fathers. Such discipline and training is not pleasant but produces the righteousness and holiness without which "no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Since the writer portrays the Christian life as a race needing gutsy endurance and a training ground in which discipline is meted out, we are correct in saying that obtaining the eschatological prize takes ardent effort. There is no call to passivity here! In order to run the race and fight the fight of faith, we must "strengthen feeble arms and weak knees (Heb 12:12). The race will not be won without the most rigorous training, nor will we complete it without a fierce resolve to shed all that hinders us."⁸

The co-authors of *The Race* fixate on their idea that eschatological salvation (eternal life) is received only after death and that "obtaining the eschatological prize [eternal life] requires ardent effort." Schreiner and Caneday fail to note that God's parental discipline in Hebrews 12 conflicts with their position.

How so? Consider Heb 12:7: *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?* Fathering a son (human procreation) precedes the father's disciplining that son, as regenerating a son precedes God's chastening that son. There is symmetry.

Further, Heb 12:5, 7, 8, and 11 each use the noun *chastening* (*paidia*), while Heb 12:6, 7, and 10 each use the cognate verb *chasten* (*paideuō*). Two common words for *child* are *pais* and *paidion*. The fact that these words all come from the same root is important. *Chasten* (*paideuō*) and *chastening* (*paidia*) really refer to *child-training*, in other words, *family-discipline*. Through regeneration one enters God's family, and then the Lord uses family-discipline as needed. Schreiner and Caneday fail to recognize that family discipline comes after sonship.

⁴Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 73.

⁵The authors of *The Race* consistently argue that no one who lacks a holy and committed lifestyle will be saved eternally. They do not speak of positional sanctification, but of progressive sanctification.

⁶Schreiner and Caneday do not use *experience* to contrast growing Christians versus stagnated Christians. Rather, they use *experience* to differentiate recipients of eternal life from non-recipients. They view believers experiencing (acquiring) eternal life only after physical life ends. By contrast, no unbeliever will ever experience (acquire) it.

⁷Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race*, 73.

⁸*Ibid.*, 313.

God's Father-to-son relationship with the readers of Hebrews has parallels with human familial relationships. Thus, Heb 12:7 reinforces what 2:11 and 3:1 say:

For both He who sanctifies [Ho hagiāzōn] and those who are sanctified [hoi hagiāzomenoi] are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren (2:11, author's translation⁹).

Therefore, holy [hagioi] brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus (3:1 NKJV).¹⁰

Both the words *sanctifies* and *sanctified* in 2:11 come from the Greek verb *hagiāzō* (to sanctify). The word *holy* in 3:1 is from the cognate noun *hagios*. Setting someone apart to God is common to all three uses. Jesus Christ is the Sanctifier: "He who sanctifies." Believers are the sanctified: "those who are sanctified" and "holy [brethren]."

Both passages refer to brethren. Hebrews 2:11 clarifies what the author means by calling his readers *brethren*. Both the Sanctifier (Christ) and the sanctified ones (believers) are of one Father. So believers are Christ's brethren by implication.

Hebrews 3:1 also contains an important clue for 2:11: the timing of regeneration and the timing of positional sanctification. The author of Hebrews addresses the readers as *holy* (i.e., sanctified) *brethren*. They were saints and brethren before he wrote.

Furthermore, Heb 13:22 calls the book of Hebrews a *word of exhortation* to brethren. Yet, if the co-authors of *The Race* were right, *brethren* would be an inappropriate way to refer to believers. Yet, Hebrews calls the readers

⁹The NKJV adds *being* to its translation of the second use of *hagiāzō* in Heb 2:11: *those who are being sanctified*. It views this as progressive sanctification, not positional. Though grammatically possible, context weighs against this view. Believers are God's children, because Christ, the Sanctifier, has positionally sanctified them. Progressive sanctification neither renders people into God's children nor into Christ's brethren. My translation of the second use of *hagiāzō* in 2:11 is *those who are sanctified*.

¹⁰Emphasis added.

saints and brethren. Schreiner and Caneday's interpretation of Heb 12:14 actually flies in the face of the book.

III. A TEST CASE FOR THE RUN-FOR-YOUR-LIVES VIEW: HEBREWS 12:14

Many verses in Hebrews disprove the run-for-eternal-life view, but a few passages have been suggested as support for that view. Hebrews 12:14 is one such verse.¹¹ It is a good test case.

A. PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS 12:14

Two topics require attention before embarking on more controversial issues. What is the requirement for seeing the Lord? Is it peace plus holiness or holiness alone? And, what type of holiness is requisite? Is it positional or experiential?

What is required to see the Lord? Before considering points where scholars often disagree, consider a pertinent, but non-controversial, issue of Greek grammar. To what word (or words) does *which* refer? *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*

English seems to allow options. The first apparent option is: *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which [peace and holiness] no one will see the Lord."*¹² The second option (supported by the Greek) is: *"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which [holiness] no one will see the Lord."*

¹¹Many writers would suggest Heb 6:4-8 and 10:26-31 as support for the run-for-eternal-life view, but much has also been written against that interpretation of those passages. Therefore, it is wise to give attention to Heb 12:14, which has been, until now, somewhat of a sleeper text in the current debate until now.

¹²Joseph Augustus Seiss, *Lectures on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 360, treats both the feminine noun *peace* (*eireṽneṽ*) and the masculine noun *holiness* (*hagiasmos*) as antecedents of the masculine form of *which*. Rather, the Greek text requires that holiness be the only antecedent of *which*.

Peace is feminine in Greek; *holiness* is masculine, as is *which*. Therefore, *holiness* (not *peace*) is the stated requirement for seeing the Lord.¹³ As the one necessary precondition, the focal point must be to understand both *holiness* and *seeing the Lord* in the context. Peace, though important, does not receive the same level of emphasis as *holiness* here.

Is positional or experiential holiness required? Some Christians limit the requirement of holiness in Heb 12:14 to positional holiness (often called positional sanctification), the idea that each believer is a saint (*hagios*).¹⁴ If this interpretation were correct, the verse would merely say that all saints will see the Lord, while unbelievers will never do so. The time of this seeing would be in the eschatological future.

Context does not present positional sanctification as sufficient. Unholiness (sin) hinders one from seeing the Lord.¹⁵ Why is not positional sanctification enough?

The verb, *diōkō* (to pursue) has two objects in v 14: *peace* and *holiness*. The readers are to pursue peace with all.¹⁶ Peace with fellow believers is the priority, but Hebrews would encourage living peaceably with outsiders as well. They are to pursue an uncontentious and unprovocative

¹³Relative pronouns in Greek take different genders depending on the word or words to which they refer. If the relative pronoun (*which*) had been intended to refer both to the feminine noun (peace) and to the masculine noun (holiness), then the author would have used the neuter form. Greek uses neuter for multi-word antecedent, such as *peace and holiness*. The fact that the author used the masculine form of the relative pronoun points to *holiness* as the antecedent.

¹⁴The NT often calls believers *saints*. The words *saint* (*hagios*) and *to sanctify* (*hagiazō*) come from the same root. Paul even calls the Corinthians saints in a positional sense (1 Cor 1:2; 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13), though their conduct was not saintly. Does Heb 12:14 require *positional sanctification* or *experiential sanctification* (positional sanctification would be an underlying precondition of experiential sanctification)?

¹⁵Experiential unholiness is a removable and temporary hindrance, as further exposition shows.

¹⁶The adjective all (*pas*) is slightly ambiguous, because no noun accompanies it. The options are pursuing peace with *all people*, both believers and unbelievers, or pursuing peace with *all believers*.

lifestyle. This is peace at the human level. This is not positional reconciliation, but experiential.

If the peace to be pursued is a peaceable lifestyle, certainly the holiness to be pursued also deals with how one lives. Furthermore, how can a saint (by position) pursue becoming a saint (which is already true of him)? By illustration, is it logical for an American citizen to pursue becoming an American citizen? Is it sensible for saints in Hebrews to pursue becoming saints? The author of Heb 13:22 addresses his entire readership as *brethren*. In turn, Hebrews 2:11 equates brethren and saints: The sanctifier (Christ) and sanctified ones (saints) are of One Father, so the sanctifier calls saints brethren. Saints are Christ's brethren, because God the Father is Father to both Christ and to the saints. What sense would it make for the author (who calls his readers *saints*) to urge them to pursue becoming *saints*? None whatsoever. Context requires holiness in Heb 12:14 to be experiential.

B. RESOLVING CONTROVERSIES IN HEBREWS 12:14

The greatest controversies in this passage are: “when will the Lord be seen?” and “by whom will the Lord be seen?” Important aspects of these vital issues have received scant attention.

When will the Lord be seen? Thomas Hewitt notes that most commentators assume that the time when the Lord will be seen is at the Second Advent. He sets forth an alternative to the default view:

The difficulty here, however, is the limitation of the vision [by commentators] to that definite revelation of God, which is the result of Christ's Second Advent, whereas it may also mean an emblematic representation of an innermost vision through intimate personal fellowship with Christ.¹⁷

¹⁷Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [first series], ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 197.

Hewitt does not expand his case for *seeing the Lord* as “intimate personal fellowship with Christ,” versus a reference to physically seeing Him at a future eschatological event.¹⁸

Hebrews sometimes uses either verb for seeing (*blepō* or *horaō*) in figurative ways:¹⁹

But we see [blepomen, from blepō] Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels...(2:9a).

Hebrews was written more than thirty years after Jesus died and rose. Its author never heard or saw Jesus with physical eyesight.²⁰ Even so, the author includes himself in seeing, by saying *we see Jesus*. This is not seeing with eyes, but intimate personal fellowship with the Lord. Heb 12:14 expresses the desire that readers will walk in fellowship with the Lord.

So we see [blepomen, from blepō] that they [Israel in Moses' day] could not enter in... (3:19).

In this passage *see* figuratively means *to understand or to know*.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see [blepete, from blepō] the Day approaching (10:25).

Once again, the readers should recognize that judgment day was near for Jerusalem, when Roman armies would surround it in their time. They were to know that God

¹⁸ Hewitt regards the Second Advent as Jesus' next encounter with planet Earth. Actually, the Rapture is the next such event, but my restatement is generic: a future eschatological event.

¹⁹ A few more uses in the book seem figurative, but this is a sufficient sample.

²⁰ Note Heb 2:3: *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord (1), and was confirmed to us (2) by those who heard Him (3)?* (emphasis added). Note that the verse does not put the three underlined phrases in chronological order. First, the Lord spoke (1). Second, He was heard by certain people, including His disciples, the apostles (3). Third, the apostles confirmed that word to others, including the author (2). The use of the first person plural (*us*) clarifies that the author received his message through the apostles. He did not hear Jesus personally.

would not deliver Jerusalem from the siege of AD 70.²¹ It is a matter of knowing, not seeing.

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see [idein, from horaō] death...(11:5).

By definition, when a person dies, he does not see. One does not literally see his own death. Once death ends eyesight, by what means will a person view his death? The passage affirms that Enoch was spared from experiencing death. *See* is used figuratively for *experiencing*.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen [idontes, from horaō] them afar off...(11:13).

The promises refer to God fulfilling His unconditional covenants with Israel during the Millennium. Certainly, OT saints could not see the Millennial Kingdom with literal eyes. The idea is that they knew the certainty that God would fulfill His promises to them personally. The only way God could keep the promise was through resurrection and the granting of everlasting life.²² They saw the future fulfillment through the eyes of faith.

By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing [horōn, from horaō] Him who is invisible (11:27).

²¹ Editor's note: Another possibility is the Day (*hemera*) here refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:13; 4:3; 5:5).

²² For example, note Gen 13:14-15: “And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants [seed] forever.’” God did not merely promise the land to Abram's seed forever, but to Abram also. Apart from resurrection and the granting of everlasting life, it would be a hollow promise. Hebrews 11:17-19 comments upon Genesis 22, saying that Abraham believed in resurrection. This is eminently reasonable, since Gen 15:13-16 says the fulfillment of the promises would be at least 400 years future, long after Abram's death: “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’” Abram knew that resurrection was crucial to God's keeping His promise.

Moses' endurance developed from him *seeing* the invisible God. The expression refers to Moses' certainty that the God who spoke to Him is real, though invisible. Moses saw Him who cannot be seen (not a *seeing* with the eyes).

Thus, Heb 2:9; 3:19; 10:25; 11:5, 13, 27 all use *see* in a figurative sense; these people saw truth with the eyes of faith, not with literal eyes. The time frame for this figurative seeing is before death, while the person is living. Remember that Hewitt maintains that commentators straitjacket *will see the Lord* by uncritically assuming reference to an eschatologically future event.²³ Yet, an in-time interpretation of the phrase *will see the Lord* (in this life) is quite possible. Hewitt observes:

The difficulty here, however, is the limitation of the vision [by commentators] to that definite revelation of God, which is the result of Christ's Second Advent, whereas it may also mean an emblematic representation of an innermost vision through intimate personal fellowship with Christ.²⁴

Hewitt decries how interpreters only imagine one time when the Lord will be seen: the eschatological future. He opens our eyes (so to speak) to the possibility of seeing the Lord now in the sense of *intimate personal fellowship with Christ*. Paraphrasing the verse may illustrate that the future tense need not talk about the eschatological future:

Without holiness, no one will have fellowship with the Lord.

Fellowship with the Lord requires walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and confessing one's sins (1 John 1:9). "Without holiness, no one will have fellowship with the

Lord." The future tense often refers to events of the near future on earth. Hewitt says that interpreters should not limit seeing to physical sight. Neither should they limit the future tense to the time of the eschatological future.

Zane Hodges was an interpreter who did not come under the critique of Thomas Hewitt. Hodges did not limit the passage to the eschatological future:

Since no sin can stand in God's presence, Christians must—and will be—sinless when they see the Lord (cf. 1 John 3:3). That realization offers motivation for pursuing holiness here and now. But the author may also have had in mind the thought that *one's perception of God even now is conditioned by his real measure of holiness* (cf. Matt. 5:8).²⁵

Course notes for Hodges's class in Hebrews show that he did not limit seeing to physical sight when entering the Lord's presence. Observe his second point:

Its importance [i.e., the importance of holiness] is attested by the fact that those who see God must have it:

All Christians will have it at the moment when Christ comes: 1 John 3:2.

But the ancient world made much of the "vision" of God.

Such spiritual *seeing* required purity.²⁶

Hodges refers to *the vision of God* as *spiritual sight* and regards it as an important part of the believer's Christian walk while on earth.

Holiness will be necessary when we come into His presence at the *Bēma* (after this life) and it is prerequisite to having fellowship with the Lord (during this life). However, no one-to-one correspondence exists between

²³ We previously considered Hewitt's observation. See fn 17.

²⁴ Hewitt, *Hebrews*, 197. Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 324; Donald Guthrie, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [second series], ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 257.

²⁵ Zane C. Hodges, S.v. "Hebrews" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament edition, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 810, emphasis added.

²⁶ Zane C. Hodges, "Class Notes: Greek 225: The Epistle to the Hebrews," Spring Semester 1986, 231. That was the last time he taught the course at Dallas Theological Seminary before retiring.

these two issues. All believers, even those who fail to see the Lord in this life, will see Him in the next.

For however long a believer allows himself to slide into unholiness (sin), he precludes having fellowship with the Lord. However, even the believer who lives in long-term carnality will be cleansed by the Lord and will see Him in eternity. Furthermore, 1 John 1:9 offers cleansing to the believer aware of sin in his life, so that he can see the Lord in this life. In other words, during a believer's lifetime, sin can prevent him from seeing the Lord with spiritual sight, but cannot prevent seeing Him in eternity.

This is crucial. Interpreters who say that living an unholy lifestyle absolutely precludes one from ever seeing the Lord simply do not *see* what this passage asserts. They have not *seen* their way past the artificial limitation which Thomas Hewitt highlights.

The first of two main questions is *when will the Lord be seen?* Now that it is answered, the second question deserves attention.

By whom will the Lord be seen? Assumptions cloud understanding of texts. Most read Heb 12:14 as if *you* appeared in the second clause. It does not, but the following is how people understand the verse:

[*You*] pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which *you* will not see the Lord.

In other words, most interpret this as if Hebrews' exclusive point were to tell the readers how to live so that they themselves would see the Lord. Brashly stated, *Straighten up, so that you will see the Lord*. Rather, within the flow of Hebrews, it should be, *Pursue holiness, so that others (as well as you) will see the Lord [i.e., will have fellowship with Him]*.

William Lane insightfully speaks of Hebrews wanting others to be influenced by believers' holiness,

They are to participate in the process of being made holy by cultivating a life-style that is pleasing to God. When the preacher [the writer

of Hebrews] instructs his friends to "pursue the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" he is urging them to reflect the essential quality of the Father so that *a pagan society will recognize in them the family likeness!*²⁷

Lane is on the right track, but his statement requires refinement. He recognizes that personal holiness affects others. Yes, it can even influence unbelievers, something the author of Hebrews would not deny. However, the effect on outsiders is not the focal point of Hebrews. The focus is upon fellow believers in the congregation who are vulnerable to dropping out. Consider the following:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12-13).

By way of illustration, assume that the congregation to which Hebrews is written has fifty members. The word *you* would address all fifty, but *any of you* would refer to a smaller number who had serious spiritual problems that, left unchecked, would lead to defecting from the Lord. The author wants believers to minister to each other, especially to those who might fall away.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:24-25).

Once again, the focus is upon ministering to other believers within the congregation

Pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be

²⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 167, emphasis added.

any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright (Heb 12:14-16).

Hebrews 12 urges those in the congregation to minister to their fellow believers. Lane properly notes that personal holiness is not only for the good of the individual, but also for those who know him. It is not incidental that the writer said *no one*, rather than *you will not*. *Pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord*.

Interestingly, John MacArthur expresses the same view as Lane. Unfortunately, he also characterizes it as ministry to unbelievers outside, rather than to fellow believers in the congregation. However, he is right in seeing the effect of holiness upon others:

The most difficult part of the verse is to interpret *without which no one will see the Lord*. I believe the reference is to unbelievers who observe our pursuit of peace and holiness, without which they would not be drawn to accept Christ themselves. The passage does not read “without which *you* will not see the Lord,” but *without which no one will see the Lord*. In other words, when unbelievers see a Christian’s peacefulness and holiness, they are attracted to the Lord. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). And He prayed to His Father that “they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me” (John 17:21). Our love for each other is a testimony to the Father and to the Son. It is a means of drawing people to Christ, apart from whom *no one will see the Lord*. As we run the race, leaving a straight path, showing love to men by peacemaking, and showing love to God by holiness, people will see the Lord.²⁸

²⁸ John F. MacArthur, S.v. “Hebrews” in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 405-406, emphasis his.

Other than insisting that Hebrews focuses on holiness as a way to minister to unbelievers, he is on the right track. Otherwise, this is a fine quote.

MacArthur rightly says that people will see the Lord during this life (when unbelievers respond to holiness in a Christian’s life by believing in Christ). Thus, MacArthur agrees with the timing of people’s seeing the Lord (as during their lifetime on earth) and that people other than the ones manifesting holiness are the ones who will come to see the Lord.

IV. CONCLUSION

The combined answer to the questions “When will people see the Lord?” and “Who is it that will see the Lord?” is that holiness in the life of one believer can draw other believers to a closer walk with the Lord (e.g., spiritual vision of the Lord) in time. Holiness in the lives of believers may even attract unbelievers to Christ.

Eric Liddell refused to run his best event (the 100 meter race) at the 1924 Paris Olympics because it was on a Sunday. He did not understand liberty and did not know that the Church is not under Israel’s rules, but he conducted his life to please the Lord. Since he could not run the 100 meter race, he was allowed to run the 400 meter race (not his best event). As he ran, he held a piece of paper with 1 Sam 2:30, “Those who honour me I will honour” (KJV). Not only did he win, but set a world record. Eric Liddell’s courage and desire to please the Lord with holiness motivated many believers to seek a closer walk with the Lord. This powerful message caused the movie *Chariots of Fire* to become a major hit.

How we live our lives can help other believers see the Lord more clearly. Therefore, may each of us pursue holiness, in part, to help other believers see the Lord!