Holiness

> *"Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord"* **(Heb.12:14).**

According to this verse it sounds as if one has to achieve a certain level of holiness before one can see the Lord and be saved. It is also the way in which it is preached in some religious circles. This understanding of **Hebrews 12:14** causes much stress, because there is always the underlying uncertainty of knowing whether one has done enough in terms of holiness to be saved one day. What increases the doubt is the fact that Christians have different ideas about what is holy and what is not. So for instance, some believers think that in order to be holy one should regularly attend church, pray and read the Bible and be a faithful tither. Furthermore, in some groups believers feel more holy when they wear certain types of clothes. People tend to make up their own list of do's and don't's of what they think is holy and unholy. **The fact that Scripture admonishes believers to be holy is not disputed, what is questioned though, is the fact that some believe that Hebrews 12:14 declares that without reaching a certain degree of holiness, one will not be saved and see God.** This belief, however, contradicts what is written in **Ephesians 2:8-9** which declares:

> *"For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it."* (GNB).

The apparent contradiction between **Hebrews 12:14** and **Ephesians 2:8-9** is caused by a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Greek word *hagiasmos.* It is usually translated as holiness. In isolation, when the whole context of the Book of Hebrews is not taken into consideration, it does seem that **Hebrews 12:14** declares that a certain state of holiness must be reached in order to be saved. With this in mind, the nagging question can be asked, how much holiness is necessary in order to qualify? – 50%, 80% or 100%?
The context of the book of Hebrews, which emphasizes the principle of making holy by a sacrifice, clarifies what is meant by *hagiasmos* which is usually translated as "holiness." **Hebrews 9:13-14** provides an explanation of what holiness means in the context:

> *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ (who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God) purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"*

The meaning of *hagiasmos*

> *"Hagiasmos refers not only to the activity of the Holy Spirit in setting man apart unto salvation and transferring him into the ranks of the redeemed, but also to enabling him to be holy...Hagiasmos is similar to dikaiosis,* ***justification, which denotes not only the act of God's free grace in justifying sinners, but also the result of that justification"*** (The Complete WordStudy Dictionary – New Testament – Spiros Zodhiates, my emphasis).

According to this rendering of the word *hagiasmos,* it does **not refer to a proses** through which somebody is trying to be holy, **but to a state of holiness** in which the believer finds

himself as result of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him at the moment of being spiritually born again. According to the definition of the Greek word, what believers are admonished to "pursue," is to hold on to the belief that the holiness of Christ was imputed to them at rebirth. *Hagiasmos* is thus not a reference to a process of trying to be holy in order to be saved, but a reference to the holy state in which the sinner finds himself as result of the righteousness of Jesus Christ that was imputed to him at rebirth when he accepted Jesus as his Saviour:

> *"But of Him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification and redemption..."* (**1Cor. 1:30).**

Zodhiates also explains the word for holiness as follows:

> "*A state of being sanctified, not as a process, but the result of a process."*

This meaning of the word is confirmed by what is declared in **Hebrews 10:14:**

> *"Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy"* (**Heb.10:14**, NIV**).**

In this verse we see the twofold position of the believer in Christ; the atonement makes us holy in terms of our status before the Father, but practical speaking, in this life, after having been saved and after having received the imputed righteousness of Christ, we now have to grow to spiritual maturity in terms of bearing the fruit of the spirit **(2 Pet.1:3-9).**
Hebrews 12:14 is not an admonishment to strive for more holiness in order to be saved, but an encouragement to keep trusting in the imputed righteousness of Christ which makes us holy. **What Hebrews 12:14 is saying is that one must be born again in order to receive the rigteousness of Christ in order to be saved.**
How we understand *hagiasmos* in **Hebrews 12:14** must aggree with what is taught in the Book of Hebrews as a whole. It teaches that we are not saved by our own achievements, but by faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In the context the writer warns believers not to revert back to depending on keeping the laws of the Old Testament in order to be saved (**Heb. 4:14; 6:1, 4–6; 9:14; 10:23).** If **Hebrews 12:14** is interpreted in such a way that it is used to admonish believers to strive for more holiness in order to be saved, it would contradict what is clearly stated in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that says we are saved by grace, through faith, not of ourselves through works, because it is a gift of God.

The following verses from the book of Hebrews clarify the meaning of *hagiasmos.* In each verse it can be seen that the meaning is based on the merit of the atonement of Christ on the cross:
Heb.2:11 – "*For both **He who sanctifies** and they who are sanctified are all of One..."*
Heb.10:10 – *"By this will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*
Heb.10:14 – ***"****For **by one offering He has perfected forever** those who are sanctified."*
Heb. 10:29 – *"...how much worse punishment do you think will be thought worthy to receive, the one trampling the Son of God, and having counted common the blood of the covenant in **which he was sanctified**, and having insulted the Spirit of Grace?"* (LITV).

Heb.13:12 - *"Therefore Jesus also, so that He might* ***sanctify the people through His own blood,*** *suffered outside the gate."*

Old Testament examples of holiness attained through anointing make it clear that *hagiasmos* (holiness) in Heb.12:14 refers to imputed righteousness and not to holiness achieved by personal effort.

Ex.29:44 – *"And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar. I will also sanctify both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me in the priest's office."*

Ex.30:29-30 – *"And you shall sanctify them so that they may be most holy. Whatever touches them shall be holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them, so that they may minister to Me in the priest's office."*

Ex.40:9-10 – "*And you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle, and all in it, and shall sanctify it and all the vessels of it.* ***And it shall be holy****. And you shall anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all its vessels, and sanctify the altar. And it shall be a most holy altar."*

The purpose of anointing in the Old Testament was to consecrate persons and things for service.

Lev. 8:10 - *"And Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and sanctified them."*

The Longman's Dictionary* gives the meaning of *"to consecrate"* as *... "...to declare as holy...to set apart solemnly for a particular purpose."

In conclusion

The holiness spoken about in **Hebrews 12:14** refers to the imputed holiness of Christ. What the verse must be saying is that without being born again and receiving His righteousness, one cannot be saved and see God.

The believer, after having been saved through faith in the merit of Christ, must now strive to grow in personal maturity in order to bear more fruit of the spirit in order to be more fruitful in the kingdom of God:

> *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence...* ***For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith*** *with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*
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> **(2Pet.1:3-12, ESV,** my emphasis).
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