

“Worship is Following Through” Haggai 2:10-19

Good intentions are not blessed by God, but faithful service is rewarded.

Discard Contaminates
Obedience Rewards

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Haggai 2:10-14, NKJV

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, “If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?” ’”

Then the priests answered and said, “No.”

And Haggai said, “If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?”

So the priests answered and said, “It shall be unclean.”

Then Haggai answered and said, “‘So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,’ says the Lord, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’”

Many things said in the Old Testament by the prophets are often difficult to understand by God’s people today. This is due to difference in culture and Jesus’ fulfillment of ceremonial and sacrificial system of worship practiced by the people of Israel. The idea of clean and unclean things is foreign to most followers of Christ unless they have an understanding of the Jewish kosher laws in the Old Testament. Therefore, it is important to take a moment to understand the concept of holy and defiled in the context in this passage before starting to see how it applies to God’s people in the twenty first century.

God taught His people about things considered to be clean and unclean or contaminated as recorded in Leviticus 11:1-47 and Numbers 19:1-22. Being defiled or unclean did not mean there was something physically wrong with the person, but the person was made unable to enter in the presence of God. Sin caused a person to be unable to come before the Lord without facing judgment which was immediate death as two of Aaron’s sons experienced when they brought unauthorized fire to the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:1-3). Leviticus 11 speaks about animals that would cause a person to be ceremonially unclean. Numbers 19 details activities that caused people to become unclean or unable to worship or enter into the presence of God.

These purity laws were important since the unclean animals God identifies in Leviticus 11 were all connected in some fashion to pagan worship. The activities the Lord identifies as making a person unclean were all things that also were part of pagan worship of Egypt where the Israelites came out of and of the Promised Land where they were entering. The Lord proclaimed the time of separation of cleansing so there would be no connection between worship of Him and the practices of the pagan worshipers. The

purity laws of Israel were nothing new, but in many ways similar to worship done by those who worshiped false gods.

The difference between the purity laws and cleansing the people of Israel went through was to allow them to enter into the presence of the Lord and welcome them back into worship without fear of death from the judgment of their uncleanness. Something defiled will contaminate that which is clean, but what is clean is unable to make clean what has been defiled. This is the reason the priests answered in the manner they did when asked by Haggai the questions from God.

The people were unable to offer any acceptable sacrifice to God since their ceremonial uncleanness contaminated all the offerings they brought because they had not acknowledged and repented of their sins. The people were worshiping idols in their homes and out in the hills and groves in the wilderness throughout the week and coming before the Lord on the Sabbath as if He truly was the only One whom they worshiped. Their divided loyalty had caused them to be contaminated and unfit to offer the sacrifices of the Lord. God had offered mercy to the people by giving them warnings through the prophets like Haggai and Zechariah who ministered during the same time to the people of God.

There are no purification laws in effect for those who are in Christ since He provided the ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins by His death and resurrection from the grave. The concept of that which is unclean contaminating what is holy, but that holiness or cleanness making something that is contaminated clean is still true. A child of God cannot dabble in sinful activity and expect that they will somehow make it acceptable is ridiculous. Sin is sin and it will always be sin. Those in Christ are not contaminated by touching or being in the presence of sin due to Christ's sanctification of their life, but it is not beneficial to entertain that which defiles since it hinders the submission, walk, and commitment of a child of God in worship of God.

Jesus specifically addresses this in Matthew 5:27-30,

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." (NKJV)

Jesus encourages His disciples to take whatever it is that causes or exposes His follower to sin and "*pluck it out...cut it off and cast it from you*". The writer of Hebrews was inspired to proclaim it in this way, "*...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*" (Hebrews 12:1, NKJV). Removing things that tempt and cause the focus on the Lord to waver means there are some things the children of God will have to deny themselves for their spiritual growth.

This will be different for each of God's children since all are unique in our personalities and things which have been experienced in life. There are certain things that some of God's children will have to refrain from doing which other believers can

engage in without guilt or shame. Apostle Paul was inspired by God to explain it in this way in his first letter to the believers in Corinth,

²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶ for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."

²⁷ If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." ²⁹ "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? ³⁰ But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?

³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:25-33, NKJV)

The goal of life for the follower of Christ should always be to follow through with their submission to God's authority, walk with Him in obedience, and commitment of everything to His control in their life. This is what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth. God's people must be obsessed with making sure all the things in their life is either drawing them closer to God personally or helping others to know Him as Savior and Lord of their life as well.

God was speaking to the people of Haggai's time through the prophet to help them see how they had become defiled, unclean, and contaminated and were under His judgment by being unable to worship. The Spirit of God is speaking to those who are in Christ today in conjunction with the whole of Scripture. Followers of Christ are encouraged to be holy as He is holy by being outwardly visibly different from the world. By doing this one can reveal the internal holiness of Christ living within them.

God's people cannot make anyone else holy or clean. God is the only One who is capable of changing a person's heart. He accomplishes that by bringing them first to acknowledge their sin, come to the place of repentance, and then follow through with giving each moment of the rest of their earthly life over to the will of the Father. This is just what Jesus did during His ministry while He walked upon the earth.

Therefore, it is of the greatest importance for those who claim to be followers of Christ to live in a manner that distinguishes the presence of God living in them. The character of God will shine through in their lifestyle and all their dealings with all people. Those who are worshiping God by following through in obedience to Him will discover the miraculous power of God in the smallest of ways each day.

Obedience Rewards

Haggai 2:15-19, NKJV

'And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord—since those days, when one came to a

heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the Lord. 'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid—consider it: Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.'"

There is no deficit or anything which is lacking in the life of God's people. Many will often argue this point by identifying things they see as evidence of lacking. In reality, what God ordains for each of His children is exactly what they need to be able to accomplish what He has designed and called them to join Him in doing: revealing Himself to His creation. Sometimes God equips His people more by what He does not give them instead of by what He does give them. At other times He will remove from His people things they would like to have in order to help them rely less on what they can see and more on Him who cannot be seen but is ever-present.

The people delayed obeying the command of the Lord to rebuild the temple upon returning from exile in Babylon. God warned the Israelites long before they ever laid eyes on the Promised Land the consequences of their disobedience to His commands.

¹⁵ "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

¹⁶ "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

¹⁷ "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

¹⁸ "Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.

¹⁹ "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

²⁰ "The Lord will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me. ²¹ The Lord will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. ²² The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. (Deuteronomy 28:15-22, NKJV)

God sent Amos to explain to the people before going into exile that He was fulfilling the promised consequences disobedience brought upon them.

*⁹ "I blasted you with blight and mildew.
When your gardens increased,
Your vineyards,*

*Your fig trees,
And your olive trees,
The locust devoured them;
Yet you have not returned to Me,”
Says the Lord. (Amos 4:9, NKJV)*

These are all the things the returning exiles were experiencing again due to their disobedience to the Lord’s command to rebuild the temple. Haggai calls the people to remember what they had known to be true before repenting and following through with what the Lord had commanded them to do.

Prior to laying the foundation of the temple, when the people expected that they had 393.6 liters (104 gallons) of wheat they discovered they only had 196.8 liters (52 gallons). Those who estimated they had 1135 liters (300 gallons) of wine they realized they only had 454.2 liters (120 gallons). God decreased what they had in storage and stunted the production of their crops to show the consequences of their worship to false gods. Their worship was bringing them harm rather than good. Yet, they stubbornly insisted on attempting to fix the problem they found instead of seeking to understand what was causing the problem to be present.

There are many lengths people go through in their lives to fix and avoid difficult and stressful circumstances from occurring. Much time and energy is wastefully invested in these things when in reality they would be cleared up through turning to the Lord in simple obedience which He will richly bless. It was only after the people repented and began doing what it was God had instructed them to do that the circumstances changed in the community. God was guaranteeing that the crop in the ground, that had yet to break forth, or the vine and fruit tree that had not yet blossomed would be bountiful.

God wants people to realize their dependency is not on things but on the Lord. This means obedience to Him is what is needed when encountering problems and hardships rather than trying to solve the situation through human logic and wisdom. God explained to His people the reason for all they suffered in the wilderness wandering for 40 years because of their disobedience.

¹ “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. ² And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴ Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵ You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. (Deuteronomy 8:1-5, NKJV)

From the Apostle Paul it is clear that God allowed him to experience abundance and the lack of things to help him be a witness to all of the power and reward of God through obedience.

¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 11-13, NKJV)

The idea that more money will fix financial problems; another person will alleviate all of life's problem; a different employment environment will make working pleasant; or a newer vehicle will solve all transportation issues is trusting more on human understanding instead of leaning on God's understanding and trusting in His ways (Proverbs 3:5-6). The solution of difficulties is found in authentic worship of God which is submission to His authority, walking in His ways, committing all circumstances and situations being endured currently into His care, and simply following through in obedience to His commands. This is worship of the One true and living God in a moment by moment manner that encompasses all of life's activities.

Please understand that this does not mean life will be free of trouble, strife, and pain. It simply means that in spite of all these things that must be endured in life as a child of God living in a creation that is in full rebellion of Him and His rule over it. Those who submit to God will find contentment, peace, and satisfaction in lean times as well as times of plenty.

The reward of the Lord for His people is with eternal things and to be living in the physical blessing of the kingdom of God in heaven. Temporal things of this world that are worthless in eternity should never be viewed as anything other than tools to be used in the promotion of the Gospel message and revealing the presence of God in this world. God's people should never view them as an end in themselves since earthly possessions will pass away, for what can be seen is not eternal but what is unseen is eternal. Apostle Paul was inspired to explain it in this way,

¹⁶ ...we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (NKJV)

The solution to all of life's problems and difficulties is turning to the Lord in worship by following through with all He has commanded and faithfully taking on the character of God. The Spirit of God renews their minds as they submit themselves to the Father's will with each decision. That is true worship in spirit and in truth as the Father desires to be worshiped by His people (John 4:23-24).

God does and continually rewards those who submit to Him as He promised He would. The Lord can defy the logic of mankind and creation obeys His every command immediately without fail. May the same obedience that was found in Christ and is in the created world also be found in those who profess Him as Savior and Lord of their lives.