

☞ Consider Your Ways

How many want to experience God's presence and power? We love it when there is a stirring of the spirit of God in our lives. We enjoy it when God is clearly pouring his blessings upon us, don't we? In the New Testament, Paul was willing to accept both blessing and hardship while serving God. However, he consistently wanted more of God's presence in his life. There should be a desire within us for the things of God. If there isn't then something is wrong.

Haggai

In Haggai, at the end of chapter one, the people are experiencing the presence and power of God in their lives. However, this only came after they were admonished to consider their ways.

Let me give you a little background on Haggai and his writing. The prophecies of Haggai were given during the time of the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity in about 520BC. Israel had been a very strong nation around 1000BC, under the rule of the kings David and Solomon, but since that time had been in decline. The Bible attributes this decline to their departure from following the ways of God correctly.

Some might be able to see a correlation with our modern-day churches. Roughly 120 years ago at the Azusa Street Revival there was a powerful outpouring of God's Spirit causing churches to thrive and missions to flourish like never before. Even in the middle of the last century there were well-known and respected spiritual leaders that influenced our government. But then many will remember how some of those leaders began to fall and over the course of years churches have declined and even forsaken many biblical standards.

I mentioned last week that it may very well be that God has orchestrated the closing of the church doors recently and that we ought to be doing a self-check. Have we lost our first love? Have we been giving God our best in worship, finances and serving? We should always be checking ourselves, but especially now, I think it is time we considered our ways.

The phrase "consider your ways" is used five times in these two short chapters. As I read this first chapter I see that there are basically two ways from which to choose. You can be "lukewarm and lacking," or you can be "repentant and revived."

☞ **1. Lukewarm and Lacking (1:1-11)**

Lukewarm is never a good thing in God's eyes.

Revelation 3:15-16 (the Laodicean church)

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

This is a very close parallel to what we're reading here in Haggai. The people were lukewarm, but God wanted them to be earnest and repent. And, if they would, he would "come in and eat with him."

☞ Part of their lukewarm attitude was because **they had misplaced priorities** (1:1-4) They were free to go to their homeland, for the purpose of building God's temple. Instead they were building their own places! I talked last week saying that God deserves the best and God is supposed to have first place in our lives.

☞ **They also had made-up excuses** for their poor priorities. If you read Ezra and Nehemiah, you know that they faced opposition. This discouraged the people from carrying on the building project. But, clearly they weren't discouraged from building their own places. Not only that, but they were building "paneled" houses, which was a luxurious type of building in those days. Another excuse is found in verse 2, "it's not time yet." But the foundation had already been put in place 16 years earlier. Neither of these things were legitimate reasons for neglecting God's priority. They were just excuses.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else."

According to Ezra, the king even supplied the money and materials for the project. Yet, they made excuses for not doing the work. But in reality, they weren't trusting God. How often are we just like that? We are lukewarm because deep down we don't trust God with our lives. We're lukewarm because we focus on ourselves too much and neglect the things of God.

In verse 8, they are told to go up into the mountains and bring down timber to build the temple. Now that's interesting, because we know from Ezra that timber had already been supplied. It may have been that some of their opposition had robbed them, but it's much more likely that they had been using it for themselves, building their paneled houses!

How often do we do the same thing? God provides for us, but we squander his provision on selfish desires. We've often heard our assets characterized as time, talents, and treasures. God gives us all of these, but do we use them only for ourselves? They and we sometimes, too, have misplaced priorities and made-up excuses.

☞ **They had misguided thinking (1:5-11)** Clearly they were living in a time when provisions were scarce. There was barely enough to eat and drink. They could barely stay clothed. They didn't earn enough to have any kind of savings. It's easy to see how they may have thought that there wasn't enough to do the work on the temple. They might

have thought that since there was so little, they should focus on surviving first, and then, maybe someday they would have enough for God's work.

This kind of thinking is prevalent today. And in the natural it makes perfect sense. But God doesn't operate according to natural principles, he operates by Kingdom principles.

These people had been in Babylon for 50 years and it showed. They were thinking like Babylonians. It was a "me first" attitude. We have the same problem today. "What about me?" "What's in it for me?" "I'll think about God after I'm all settled down."

We are being influenced by our culture when **we are supposed to be culture changers!** We saw this last week: When things are tight, God comes in last place. But, God is supposed to always be first. Here are some more:

"If someone hurts you, get even." But, we're supposed to turn the other cheek.

"The more you have, the happier you'll be." But, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

"Only the strong survive." But, the meek will inherit the earth.

"Show no mercy." But, the merciful will receive mercy.

"Don't judge anyone." But, we are to judge those inside the church.

"Don't offend anyone with your beliefs." But, it's the truth that sets people free.

"Don't bring God into politics." But, righteousness exalts a nation.

"There are many ways to God." But, Jesus is the only way.

"Everything is relative." But, God's Word gives absolute standards.

"I'm entitled, and I deserve it." But, life itself is a gift. And, the bible says, if you don't work, you don't eat.

"Me first." But, we're supposed to serve each other and put others ahead of ourselves.

"I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!" But God resists the proud.

The people basically thought that if they did the required religious practices, they could live any way they chose. But, our entire lives are to be lived for God.

☞ **Matthew 6:33**

seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

They had misguided thinking, and so do we sometimes. God calls us to always put him first and the rest will fall into place. But we so often try to get everything lined up first and then finally give time, talents, and treasures to God. That is misguided thinking!

The Hebrew phrase "be honored" in 1:8 can be translated "reveal my glory." In other words, God's glory was being obscured by his people's misplaced priorities and backward thinking. The Bible clearly tells us that God wants to make his glory visible to all people, so they can come to know him personally. But **when God's people are misaligned his glory is hidden and obscured**. Misplaced priorities, made-up excuses and misguided thinking leave us lukewarm and lacking. So, let's get our priorities right and start thinking according to Kingdom principles!

☞ 2. Repentant and Revived (1:12-15)

They obeyed and feared the Lord (verse 12)

When God speaks to us by His Word, there's only one acceptable response, and that's obedience. We don't weigh the options, we don't examine the alternatives, and we don't negotiate the terms. We simply do what God tells us to do and leave the rest with Him.

Delayed obedience is still disobedience.

☞ Acts 3:19

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord

Repentance is much more than simply feeling sorry. Repentance is captured in that second phrase, "turn to God." It means to be so sorry that you choose to change! It is "turning around."

If you're headed for a cliff in your car, you need to turn around. It makes no sense to think, "I'll just go a little slower." And, it makes no sense to think, "I'll wash my car so that it looks all clean," but then continue on headed straight for the cliff. Turn around!

Ultimately, that's what the people in Haggai's day did. They took heed, and changed their ways. If the Lord is to be pleased with us and glorified before an unbelieving world, we must hear His Word, believe it, and act upon it, no matter what the circumstances may be. After all, God is with us, and "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

One issue of Leadership Journal says, "Churchgoers may seek a 'life-changing experience' but only if it doesn't affect their lifestyle." We want life to be comfortable. We like to talk about the blessings of God but all too often we are unwilling to deal with the requirements of following God. We want the presence and power of God, but are we willing to make any changes that may be required? When Haggai's people did, they experienced God's presence and power (1:13-15)

Now, they were revived, but there was still a lot of hard work ahead of them to build that temple. In addition to facing a lot of hard work, some of the people were remembering the

former temple under Solomon; how magnificent it was. And this made them think that this one was nothing in comparison. So, maybe it's not worth the effort.

There are some listening that may remember the so-called "good old days," thinking that Christians and churches need to look like they did back then. In some ways that is true; we do need to get our priorities straight and do the fundamentals that Scripture requires. But in 2:9 God said, *"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty.*"

Thomas Jefferson said, "Every generation needs a new revolution." He was referring to politics, but a similar notion can be applied to spirituality. In fact, C.H. Spurgeon said, ☞ **"Every generation needs regeneration."** We sing a song called Give us Clean Hands, and there's a line in it that says, *"God let us be a generation that seeks; That seeks Your face oh God of Jacob."* I want to be part of a generation that genuinely seeks the Lord. I don't want to just look back to the "good old days;" I want to be part of whatever God is doing today! I don't want to just revisit days gone by, I am hoping for what God says here... that the glory will be even greater!

In 2:7 God says, "I will shake the nations" and then follows up with "I will fill this house with my glory." Clearly, there is a shaking in the nations going on right now. **Lord, let ☞ your glory fill your house!**

While this shaking is going on and our church doors have been closed, it's time for ☞ believers to do a self-check. **It's time to reorder our priorities; it's time to relinquish our excuses; and it's time to realign our thinking.** Hear the word of the Lord.

Let's not be lukewarm and therefore, lacking. **Let's humble ourselves, repent and be revived!** When we put God first and act on Kingdom principles, then God is honored and his glory will be revealed through us.

☞ **We can experience God's presence and power in a fresh, new way if we will carefully consider our ways.**

Song - Give us Clean Hands