

Keeping Clean in a Dirty World

Haggai 2:10-14

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Video: [A Prayer for Holiness](#)

I came across this honest prayer written by Frank Morris...

“Dear Lord, so far today I’ve done all right. I haven’t gossiped, haven’t lost my temper, haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, over-indulgent, coveted my neighbor’s spouse or taken your name in vain. I’m very thankful for that...but, in a few minutes, God, I’m going to get out of bed. And from then on, everyone that I encounter will probably need a lot of help from you. Amen.”

The Christian life would be easier if we could sleep all day. It’s all the stuff that happens after we get up that gives us problems.

How do we keep clean in a dirty world? How can we grow in holiness when we’re hammered by our flesh, the world and Satan?

Last weekend we saw that *God works His way and His will for His glory*. Here’s the main idea for today: *Becoming holy requires intentional effort; being unholy requires no effort*.

Please stand as I read our text from Haggai 2:10-14: ***“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, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’ The priests answered and said, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?’ The priests answered and said, ‘It does become unclean.’ Then Haggai answered and said, ‘So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.”***

This is our sixth sermon from the Book of Haggai but verse 10 establishes that this is the third sermon the remnant heard from Haggai. This message was preached

two months after the previous sermon and three months after the people had started working again on the temple. Verse 18 indicates that this is “***the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid.***” This becomes a teachable moment. The foundation is finished but they needed to have their faith fortified before going any further. While God stirred them to get to work on the physical aspects of the temple, He’s now concerned about how each of them are doing spiritually.

To say it another way, it’s easy to focus on the external while ignoring the internal. The people may have thought that since they were serving they must be OK spiritually. However, as they worked on rebuilding a habitation for God, they needed to consider God’s call for holiness for His people.

The people were constructing the temple but not much had changed in their circumstances. Since they were doing what God wanted them to do they expected their problems to go away. They were starting to wonder if it was worth it to obey God.

Let me point out once again the doctrine of inspiration from the Book of Haggai. Look at verse 10: “***...the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.***” We saw something similar at the beginning of the book in 1:1: “***...the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet...***” This is stated in a different way in 1:13: “***Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD’s message...***” and again in 2:1: “***...the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai...***” Haggai is not giving some “*Helpful habits to have a happy life*” but rather is the human messenger through whom the Lord of Hosts is communicating His message.

In verse 11 God first reminds them who He is: “***Thus says the Lord of hosts...***” The name for Lord is “*Jehovah*” or “*Yahweh*.” Jehovah is the self-existent God who is personal, present, powerful, and the ultimate promise-keeper. “***Lord of Hosts***” is a translation from *Jehovah Sabaoth*, which references the Covenant Keeper as the commander of all the armies of heaven. It’s used 14 times alone in this brief book!

After reminding them who He is, He gives them an assignment: “***Ask the priests about the law.***” There’s a sense of urgency in the original: “*Ask now...*” This was one of the purposes of the priesthood according to Malachi 2:7: “***For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.***” Specifically, according to

Ezekiel 44:23, the priests were to help the people learn how to live holy lives:
“They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean.”

With this in mind, God tells the people to go to the priests with two questions. These are a bit foreign to our ears so I'll try to explain what's going on. These questions made perfect sense to the Jews as they had hundreds of laws governing their lives. Many of these regulations had to do with what was holy and what was not.

1. The first question is found in verse 12: ***“If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?”*** Here's their response: ***“The priests answered and said, ‘No.’”***

Meat that was “**holy**” was consecrated or set apart for offerings. It was common for people to wrap this meat in the fabric of their garments to keep it separate from ordinary food like bread, stew, wine and oil. It's sort of like going to Fareway and picking out some meat. When the butcher gives it to you it's wrapped in white paper to keep it from contaminating anything else. We do it for hygiene reasons but in Jewish culture it was done for holiness.

2. The second question is found in verse 13: ***“If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?”*** The priests give their answer: ***“It does become unclean.”*** This is taught in many passages. Here's just one found in Numbers 19:11: ***“Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days.”***

God is using these two questions to help them see the insidiousness of sin and the pervasiveness of perversity. Here's the point. Hanging out with a holy person does not make you holy but hanging out with an unholy person can make you unholy. Good things do not automatically make other things good, but bad things make other things bad. We could say it like this: *Becoming holy requires intentional effort; being unholy requires no effort.*

Imagine that you have a gallon of milk in the back of your fridge that expired on Easter. It looks all curdled and crusty. When you take the top off the sour smell almost takes your breath away. And then you have a brilliant idea. Since you just bought a fresh gallon of milk, you decide to pour some of the good milk into the

gallon of gross milk in the hopes that it will make it all better. It doesn't work that way because the good can't turn the bad good. But the bad can turn the good bad.

That reminds me of two teenage daughters who asked their father if they could go to a movie. After reading some reviews, he denied their request because the movie contained nudity and portrayed immorality. The young girls appealed, "*But dad, the movie is two hours long and those scenes are just a few minutes of the total film!*" The dad held firm, "*My answer is no.*"

The two teens slumped down on the couch. As they sulked, they smelled some brownies baking in the oven. When they were done, their dad brought several on a plate. After they each took one their dad said, "*Before you eat, I want you to know I made them with the best organic flour, free-range eggs, organic sugar, premium vanilla and expensive chocolate. But there's one ingredient that wasn't in the recipe. I got it from our own back yard. There's no need to worry, because I only added the tiniest bit of it to the brownies. So go ahead, take a bite and let me know what you think.*"

The girls wanted to know more about the added ingredient so their dad assured them it was only a very small amount, less than a teaspoon. He told them they wouldn't even taste it. They persisted, wanting to know what it was. Their dad replied, "*Well, OK, if you insist. The secret ingredient is organic dog droppings.*"

They both dropped their brownies and began inspecting their fingers with horror. "*DAD! Why did you do that? We can't eat these!*" Knowing that he now had their attention for an unforgettable teachable moment, he said, "*That's why I won't allow you to watch that movie. You won't tolerate a gross ingredient in the brownies so why should you tolerate a little immorality in the movie?*"

After asking two questions and hearing their answers, God makes an important application in verse 14: "***So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.***" Here are three truths from this verse.

- **Sin leads to a ruptured relationship.** Note that God calls them, "*this people*" and "*this nation*" because they're not acting like *His* people.
- **One sin can lead to an avalanche of disobedience.** This affected "*every work of their hands.*" Sin spreads more easily than sanctification. A few worthy acts will never make up for their neglect of God because their refusal

to honor Him by holy living contaminated everything else they did.

- **God wants holy hearts more than sacrificial service.** The people brought offerings but because they had become cozy with compromise and stained by sin what they did bring was like an “***unclean offering***.” Your secret sins can keep you from blessings, even though you’re involved in serving.

I’m reminded of the stark words found in Malachi 1:10. The people were bringing lame lambs and sick sheep to God while their hearts were unholy: “***Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.***”

God longs for our obedience more than something material we might give Him according to 1 Samuel 15:22: “***Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.***”

One of the best books I’ve read on this topic is *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges. Here’s a quote that I’ve found helpful: “*Too often, we say we are defeated by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated. We are simply disobedient. It might be good if we stop using the terms victory and defeat to describe our progress in holiness. Rather, we should use the terms obedience and disobedience. When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may in fact be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey.*”

The Lord of Hosts tells us what He’s looking for in Hosea 6:6: “***For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.***” BTW, our next sermon series that will begin the last weekend in June will be called, “Behold Your God.” Our aim will be to grow in the knowledge of God through a study of the attributes of God.

Friend, God wants your heart because if He has your heart, He’ll have every part of your life. Proverbs 4:23: “***Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.***” Holiness begins in the heart. Outward acts of ritual are never enough because God is all about the relationship that stems from revering Him. We often think, “*Look what I’m doing for you, God.*” It’s easy to think that

religious activity makes us acceptable to God. But God looks at the heart. It's not enough to build the temple. They were called to build holiness into their lives.

As I think about the expansion and remodeling of our facility, I'm reminded that God is all about expanding and remodeling our faith. As we approach the fall our focus will be more on faithraising than fundraising.

Here's an observation. Years ago churches emphasized Christian standards of behavior and while this veered into legalism at times, it seems that believers were aware of the expectations of holy living. Today, the pendulum has swung the other way. Now, most believers are all about license, thinking they can do whatever they want.

I had lunch with my friend Gerard this week. He and his wife are now attending Edgewood. When I asked him his thoughts about holiness, he mentioned two extremes. One describes those who believe they have "arrived" spiritually. This can lead to self-deception and pride. The other extreme includes those who have just given up. Instead of pursuing holy living, they live disobedient lives because they believe they can never change.

When I was reflecting on this I came across an article written by Kevin DeYoung called, "The Hole in our Holiness" that is so good I've decided to quote from large sections of it. It's also posted on "Sermon Extras" if you'd like to access it.

"I have a growing concern that younger evangelicals do not take seriously the Bible's call to personal holiness. We are too at peace with worldliness in our homes, too at ease with sin in our lives, too content with spiritual immaturity in our churches.

God's mission in the world is to save a people *and* sanctify his people. Christ "***loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.***" (Eph. 5:25-27)

My fear is that as we rightly celebrate, and in some quarters rediscover, all that Christ saved us *from*, we will give little thought and make little effort concerning all that Christ saved us *to*.

The pursuit of holiness does not occupy the place in our hearts that it should. There are several reasons for the relative neglect of personal holiness.

- 1) It was too common in the past to equate holiness with abstaining from a few taboo practices like drinking, smoking, and dancing.** In a previous generation, godliness meant you didn't do these things. Younger generations have little patience for these sorts of rules. They either don't agree with the rules, or they figure they've got those bases covered so there's not much else to worry about.
- 2) Related to the first reason is the fear that a passion for holiness makes you some kind of weird holdover from a bygone era.** As soon as you talk about swearing or movies or music or modesty or sexual purity or self-control or just plain godliness, people get nervous that others will call them legalistic...
- 3) We live in a culture of cool, and to be cool means you differentiate yourself from others.** That has often meant pushing the boundaries with language, with entertainment, with alcohol, and with fashion. Of course, holiness is much more than these things, but in an effort to be hip, many Christians have figured holiness has *nothing* to do with these things. They've willingly embraced Christian freedom, but they've not earnestly pursued Christian virtue.
- 4) A radical pursuit of holiness is often suspect because any talk of right and wrong behaviors feels judgmental and intolerant.** If we are to be "without spot or blemish," it necessitates we distinguish between what sort of attitudes, actions, and habits are pure and what sort are impure. This sort of sorting gets you in trouble with the pluralism police.
- 5) There is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered, we won't talk about rules or imperatives or exhort Christians to moral exertion.** To be sure, there is a rash of moralistic teaching out there, but sometimes we go to the other extreme and act as if the Bible shouldn't advise our morals at all... We've been afraid of words like diligence, effort, and obedience. We've downplayed verses that call us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) or command us to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1) or warn against even a hint of immorality among the saints (Eph. 5:3).

I find it telling that you can find plenty of young Christians today who are really excited about justice and serving in their communities...But where are the Christians known for their zeal for holiness? Where is the corresponding passion for honoring Christ with Christlike obedience? We need more Christian leaders on our campuses, in our cities, in our seminaries who will say with Paul, "***Look carefully then how you walk.***" (Eph. 5:15)

...There are dozens and dozens of verses in the New Testament that enjoin us, in one way or another, to be holy as God is holy...I believe God would have us be much more careful with our eyes, our ears, and our mouth. It's not pietism, legalism, or fundamentalism to take holiness seriously. *It's the way of all those who have been called to a holy calling by a holy God.*

As I see it, our challenge is to live in liberty without going over the cliffs of legalism or license [show picture].

- **Legalism.** Legalism can be defined as a strict adherence to the law. Specifically, as it relates to faith, a legalist is one who believes that performance is the way to gain favor with God. Legalism emphasizes rules without relationship, standards without the Savior, and laws more than love. It's often characterized by joyless judgmentalism. Legalism is the human attempt to gain salvation or prove our spirituality by outward conformity to a list of religious "do's" and "don'ts." In a nutshell, I am walking in legalism when what I DO supersedes what Christ has already done for me.

Many Christians run from the dangerous clutches of legalism and fall into the deadly ditch of license where they cater to their carnality rather than crucifying it.

- **License.** This biblical word is translated as "***lasciviousness***" in the KJV or "***licentiousness***" and refers to undisciplined and unrestrained behavior, especially a flagrant disregard of sexual restraints. It has to do with "***outrageous conduct***" that includes a disregard for what is right. The idea is that I can do whatever I want because I'll be forgiven for whatever I do. Jude 1:4 describes those who are into license like this: "***ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality.***" Listen. Pornography, premarital, homosexual and extramarital sex is sinful, no matter what our culture says or what your heart tells you.

- **Liberty.** When we recognize that it's not a matter of what we do or don't do, but what Christ has already done, we understand our freedom to obey the Lord out of love for Him. 1 John 5:3: "***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.***" Christ has freed us to be faithful to Him as stated in Romans 8:2: "***For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.***" We are free to not sin.

We could say it like this:

- Legalism is faith *in* my works
- License is faith *without* works
- Liberty is faith that *results in* works

Many of us think that holiness is nice but not necessary, that obedience is somehow optional. This is what God says about that in Leviticus 19:2: "***You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.***" This passage is quoted in 1 Peter 1:15-16: "***But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'***" We're to be separate from sin and separated to the Savior. Our bodies belong to Him, not to ourselves.

The pursuit of holiness must guide my morals and my ethics. Holiness is all about submitting and setting apart my life for His purposes. One article I read this week put it simply and yet profoundly: "*Holiness is living God's way.*" Hebrews 12:14: "***Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.***" Jesus said it like this in Matthew 5:8: "***Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.***"

Holiness is the idea of being distinct, of being set apart from the common or ordinary. While there is certainly an individual aspect to this, it is fully fleshed out in community with other believers. That's why it's important for our faith family to be marked by holy living. The Bible says that the pursuit of holiness will involve avoiding certain activities while embracing others. Morality matters. Biblical ethics are expected for the Christian. The 10 Commandments are commands, not archaic suggestions.

This all leads to some questions. Is there a part of my life that I've not yet set apart? In what areas of my life have I been rationalizing rebellion or excusing my

behavior? It's time to stop trivializing our transgressions and to deal drastically with our sins.

Becoming holy requires intentional effort; being unholy requires no effort.

2 Corinthians 7:1 calls us to be proactive, not passive: “***Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.***”

I'm going to read Isaiah 1:11-18 and then we'll conclude with some action steps: “***What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me...your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.***”

That's pretty brutal, isn't it? Listen now to the solution for their sinful behavior: “***Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. 'Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.'***”

Action Steps

1. Practice regular confession of sin.
2. Regularly repent of sin.
3. Read your Bible daily. The June Bible reading plan is from 1 and 2 Corinthians, books that call us to holy living.
4. Memorize Scripture. Psalm 119:11: “***I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.***”
5. Find an accountability partner. If you don't have filtering software on your phone, tablet and computer, I highly recommend *Covenant Eyes*. This software

also sends a report of your Internet activity to your accountability partners. The link is posted on Sermon Extras.

6. Surrender everything to Christ and live under His lordship.

Closing Song: “Lord I Need You.”

→ **Commissioning of Canada Team.** This group will be leaving on June 8 and will be preparing a camp for a summer of ministry by doing work projects. Pray for safety. Pray the students will gain a new perspective, as they grow closer to God in this beautiful and remote environment. Pray God will use the students to step up in leading the others through prayer, small groups, and sharing of testimonies.

→ **Commissioning of Fresno Team.** This team will be leaving June 10 and will be partnering with Manuel and Kim Contreras, our Go Team Partners. They will focus on ministry to children and will also be reaching out to women who are being trafficked.

→ New Members Saturday Night

Sue Hoon
Bob and Mary Sendgikoski

→ New Members Sunday at 10:45

Tommy Anderson
Charlene Gosney?

Benediction

Receive these words from Titus 2:11-14 as our closing benediction: “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*”