

SELF EXAMINATION UNDER GOD'S MICROSCOPE: CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Haggai 1:7, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Consider you ways.*

Haggai was a Jewish prophet during the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and one of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament. His name means "my holiday". He was the first of three prophets (with Zechariah, his contemporary, and Malachi, who lived about one hundred years later), who belonged to the period of Jewish history which began after the return from captivity in Babylon.

Scarcely anything is known of his personal history. He may have been one of the captives taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. He began his ministry about sixteen years after the return of the Jews to Judah (ca. 520 BC). The foundations of the temple had been built, but then, through no fault of their own, the people had been prevented from going on with the work of building the Lord's House.

After having been suspended for eighteen years, the work was resumed through the efforts of Haggai and Zechariah.

They exhorted the people, which roused them from their lethargy, and induced them to take advantage of a change in the policy of the Persian government under Darius the Great.

The Lord's messenger, Haggai, commands a call to self-examination in chapter 1:7, "*consider your ways.*" The verse can read literally, "Set you heart upon your ways." Self-examination must be done with the heart before God. It must be a serious and honest exercise.

The importance of self-examination is emphasized by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."

C.H. Spurgeon observes, "A boy has been to school a certain time, and his master puts him through his paces—questions him, to see whether he has made any progress,—whether he knows anything. Christian, catechise your heart; question it, to see whether it has been growing in grace; question it, to see if it knows anything of vital godliness or not.

Examine it: pass your heart through a stern examination as to what it does know and what it does not know, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.”

The command *to consider your ways* in Haggai 1:7 is repeated in Haggai 1:5, 2:15,18. When the Lord speaks once it is important, but when He speaks twice it is doubly important. The word consider means *to observe closely*.

It also means *to inspect*, and this idea is used in Psalm 139:23, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: *try me* (inspect) and know my thoughts.”

Sometimes, when we want to inspect something closely, we look at it through a microscope, and we discover things that we can not see with the naked eye.

Similarly, the Bible is like a microscope that zooms in and shows us details about ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationship with Christ that we can't see otherwise. Therefore the title of my message for today is ***Self-Examination Under God's Microscope: Consider Your Ways.***

When you inspect your heart through the lens of God's microscope, the Bible, what do you see? What a tendency there is for us to consider the ways of *other people*, and how often after a worship service someone says, "If only So-and-so had been present!" But what about us? How does God's Word apply to you and to me directly? Does God's Word drive you to consider your ways!

We will be celebrating the Lord's Table very shortly, and a requirement for participating in this ordinance is found in I Corinthians 11:28, "let a man examine himself, or saying it another way, "let a man consider his ways."

As we look through God's microscope, there are three things we see in the life of the people during Haggai's day which should cause us to consider our ways.

1. There was a lack of concern for Christ.

In Haggai's day, there was a negative shift in the focus and priorities of the people regarding the Lord and His House. We read in verse 2, "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, **This people** say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."

A Bible Commentator observes, "**This** **sluggish and selfish** **people.**" The Lord does not say, My people, since they had neglected the service of God."

The attitude of the people regarding rebuilding the House of the Lord was, "There is plenty of time yet! No hurry, to do the Lord's work!

Do we not often speak in the same way? No urgency about prayer. No alarm for the unconverted sinner! They have plenty of time.

This people said, "the time is not come;" They doubtless excused themselves for working on the House of God. But God saw that indifference, and the love of worldly ease, were the true causes of their inaction. (Hag 1:4,9).

It is a bad sign when difficulties and hindrances in God's service, instead of increasing our zeal and earnestness, lead to coldness, indifference, and vain excuses; for it shows that we are willing to labor in God's cause only when it costs us no inconvenience or sacrifice.

The work of rebuilding the temple wasn't important and urgent in the minds of the people anymore. They had drifted away from the Lord. They had attended to the building of their own houses, and left the Lord's House in ruins.

The Lord responds regarding the lack of concern for Him in verse 4, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"

The Lord continues in verse 9, "Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."

The actions and attitudes of the people during Haggai's day reminded me of what Christ said to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." The church in Ephesus is described by Christ as the *loveless church*.

Albert Barnes writes, " Because thou hast left thy first love. Thou hast remitted or let down thy early love; that is, it is less glowing and ardent than it was at first. The love here referred to is evidently love to the Savior; and the idea is, that, as a church, they had less of this than formerly characterized them. In this respect they were in a state of declension; and though they still maintained the doctrines of his religion, and opposed the advocates of error, they showed less ardor of affection towards him directly than they had formerly done."

Do you love the Lord? Has your love for the Lord grown cold?

In Haggai chapter 1, the switch in priorities and the lack of concern toward the Lord left the people facing a severe famine.

We read in verses 10 and 11, “Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.”

Matthew Henry writes, “God not only withheld the cooling rains, but he appointed the scorching heats (Haggai 1:11): *I called for a drought upon the land*, ordered the weather to be extremely hot, and then the fruits of the earth were burnt up. See how every creature is that to us which God makes it to be, either comfortable or afflictive, serving us or troubling us. Nothing among the inferior creatures is so necessary and beneficial to the world as the heat of the sun; it is that which puts life into the plants and *renews the face of the earth at spring*. And yet, if that go into an extreme, it undoes all again. Our Creator is our best friend; but, if we make him our enemy, we make the best friends we have among the creatures our enemies too.”

The people were giving greater attention to their own houses than to God’s House. *Consider your ways*, says the Lord. What do you see in your heart under

God's microscope. Is there a lack of concern over you sin? Is there a lack of love for Christ in your heart? Are you busier attending to your affairs, to your wants, and to your desires than you are to Christ? Consider your ways.

2. There was a slackness in the service for Christ.

We read in Zephaniah 3:16, "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack."

Some commentators believe this verse may refer to the rebuilding of the temple of God, after the return from Babylon. It is as if Zephaniah anticipated the slackness of the people regarding the rebuilding of God's House in Jerusalem.

God's people are not to be slackers but workers.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

A Puritan author writes, “Meditation on the heavenly kingdom, would be a spur to diligence. Glory possesses an immeasurable stimulus. "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1Cor 15:58. When the mariner sees the haven, he plies harder with his oars. Just so, when we have a sight and prospect of glory, we should be much in prayer and watching (cp Mt 26:41-note); it should add wings to duty (cp Is 40:31-note), and make the lamp of our devotion burn brighter.

Abounding in the work of the Lord means do lots of it. *Abound in* means “overflow with.” Fill your days with things that count for Christ. Pray and plan and then work, work . . . work while it is day.

John MacArthur writes, “Because God has so abundantly overdone Himself for us who deserve nothing from Him, we should determine to overdo ourselves (if that were possible) in service to Him, to whom we owe everything. What a word Paul gives to the countless Christians who work and pray and give and suffer as little as they can! How can we be satisfied with the trivial, insignificant, short-lived things of the world?”

How can we “take it easy” when so many around us are dead spiritually and so many fellow believers are in need of edification, encouragement, and help of every sort? When can a Christian say, “I’ve served my time, I’ve done my part; let others do the work now”?

Reasonable rest is important and necessary. But if we err, Paul is saying, it should be on the side of doing more work for the Lord, not less. Leisure and relaxation are two great modern idols, to which many Christians seem quite willing to bow down. In proper proportion recreation and diversions can help restore our energy and increase our effectiveness. But they also can easily become ends in themselves, demanding more and more of our attention, concern, time, and energy. More than one believer has relaxed and hobbled himself completely out of the work of the Lord.”

How motivating are the words contained in the closing clause of I Corinthians 15:58, "forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Every sincere effort of gratitude—however faulty its execution—is valued by Him and shall be recompensed. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which ye have showed toward His name" (Heb 6:10).

The Christian should be fully assured that a genuine endeavor to do God's will and promote His glory will receive His smile, produce peace of conscience and joy of heart **here**, and His "well done" **hereafter**. "In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward." This was the motive which animated Moses in his great renunciation, "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Considering our ways leads us to ask ourselves the question, "Are we redeeming the time?"

Puritan Thomas Watson writes, "Make spending your TIME a matter of conscience. "Redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16).

Many people fool away their time, some in idle visits, others in recreations and pleasures which secretly bewitch the heart and take it away from better things.

What are our golden hours for—but to attend to our souls? Time misspent is not time lived—but time lost!

Time is a precious commodity. A piece of wax in itself is not worth much—but when it is affixed to the label of a will and conveys an estate, it is of great value. Thus, time simply in itself is not so considerable—but as salvation is to be worked out in it, and a conveyance of heaven depends on using it well—it is of infinite concern!

Think of your **SHORT STAY** in the world. "We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a shadow, gone so soon without a trace!" (1Chr. 29:15).

There is only a span between the cradle and the grave. Solomon says there is a time to be born and a time to die (Ecccl 3:2)—but mentions no time of living—as if that were so short it was not worth naming!

Time, when it has once gone, cannot be recalled. "My life passes more swiftly than a runner. It flees away, filled with tragedy. It disappears like a swift boat,

like an eagle that swoops down on its prey." Job 9:25,26. This Scripture compares time to a flying eagle. Yet time differs from the eagle in this: the eagle flies forward and then back again--but time has wings only to fly forward --it never returns! "Time flies irrevocably."

The serious thoughts of our short stay here would be a great means of promoting godliness. What if death should come before we are ready? What if our life should breathe out before God's Spirit has breathed in? Whoever considers how fleeting and winged his life is—will hasten his repentance!

Haggai commands us to *consider our ways*. Is there slackness in your life toward the Lord and His work? God save us from slackness and sluggishness in serving Christ.

3. There was a neglect for Christ.

The reproof which the prophet gives them for their neglect of the temple-work is recorded in Haggai 1:4, "*Is it time for you, O you! to dwell in your ceiled houses, to have them beautified and adorned, and your families settled in them?*" They were not content with walls and roofs for necessity, but they must have

for gaiety and fancy. "It is high time," says one, "that my house were wainscoted." "It is high time," says another, "that mine were painted."

And God's house, all this time, *lies waste*, and nothing is done at it. "What!" says the prophet, "is it time that you should have your humor pleased, and not time you should have your God pleased?"

How much was their disposition the reverse of David's, who could not be easy in his *house of cedar* while the *ark of God* was *in curtains* (2 Samuel 7:2), and of Solomon's, who built the temple of God before he built a palace for himself.

Matthew Henry adds, "Note, those are very much strangers to their own interest who prefer the conveniences and ornaments of the temporal life before the absolute necessities of the spiritual life, who are full of care to enrich their own houses, while God's temple in their hearts lies waste, and nothing is done for it or in it."

Does God's temple lie waste in your heart today? Are you devoting your time, energy, and resources to build yourself bigger barns?

Paul asks the question in Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape, if we **neglect** so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."

Spurgeon comments, "You see, dear friends, that we need not be great open sinners in order to perish; it is merely a matter of neglect. See how it is put here: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" You need not go to the trouble of despising it, or resisting it, or opposing it; you can be lost readily enough simply by neglecting it. In fact, the great mass of those who perish are those who neglect the great salvation Let that question ring in our ears, **How shall we escape?** There will be no escape, there can be none if we refuse the Lord Jesus. Do we mean to be lost? Dare we continue to neglect the great salvation?

If we neglect - as someone has said "The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it."

Listen to a poem on neglect:

Neglect is my sin
It brings me naught but sorrow.
I know that I should stop it
In fact, I will...tomorrow!

Neglect means literally without care and thus showing no concern. To be careless. To be unconcerned about or to care nothing for something or someone.

History tells us that only three hours neglect cost Napoleon the battle of Waterloo. Neglect of Christ's salvation will cost you eternal blessing, eternal joy, and will bring you damning judgment and eternal punishment. Do not drift past God's grace. Let it not be said of you that you neglected Jesus Christ.

Haggai saw how the people neglected the Lord and the rebuilding of the Temple. Consider your ways! Examine your life! Where do you stand with the Lord today?

In closing, the prophet Haggai commands us to consider our ways. This means, surely, that we are to consider our life and our service for the Lord. Is there a lack of concern for Christ in you? Are you slacking in Christ's work. A lack of concern and slackness in service are symptoms of neglect regarding the things of Christ. We must all examine ourselves under the microscope of God's Word. May we consider our ways and never consider them far from the Cross. Let us pray!