Live Pure Lives

Read Haggai 2:10-19

Key verse: “Is the seed yet in the granary— / or the vine, the fig tree, or the pomegranate— / or has the olive tree not borne fruit? / From this day forward, I will bless you” (Haggai 2:19).

Greg Donnelly told the story of an 81-year-old man named Robert. He had no flying experience but, because of a tragic emergency, Robert was forced to fly an airplane: On June 17, 1998, Robert and his 52-year-old pilot friend, Wesley Sickle, were flying from Indianapolis to Muncie, Indiana. During the flight, the pilot slumped over and died at the controls. The Cessna 172 single-engine plane began to nose-dive and Robert grabbed the controls. He got on the radio and pleaded for help.

Nearby were two pilots who heard the call. Mount Comfort was the closest airport, and the two pilots gave Robert a steady stream of instructions about climbing, steering—and the scariest part—landing. The two experienced pilots circled the runway three times before this somewhat frantic and totally inexperienced pilot was ready to attempt the landing.

Emergency vehicles were called out and ready for what seemed like an approaching disaster. Witnesses said the plane’s nose nudged the center line and bounced a few times before the tail hit the ground. The Cessna ended up in a patch of soggy grass next to the runway. Amazingly, Robert was not injured.

The pilot listened and followed those instructions as if his life depended on it—and it did. Imagine what great things would happen in our lives if we listened to and obeyed the Lord’s instructions with the same earnestness.

Haggai the Old Testament prophet was sent by God to call the returned Hebrew exiles to obey God and to be faithful to God. In Haggai 2:11-14, the prophet offers an illustration from their ceremonial practices: “This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: Go ahead and ask the priests for a ruling: ‘If someone lifts holy meat into the hem of one’s garment and that hem touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any kind of food, will it be made holy?’

“And the priests responded, ‘No.’
“Haggai said, ‘If an unclean person touches any of these things, will it become unclean?’

“And the priests responded, ‘It will be unclean.’

“Then Haggai responded: Thus has this people and this nation become to me, says the Lord, and everything that they do with their hands. Whatever they offer is unclean.”

Earlier in the book of Haggai, we saw that the returned exiles to Jerusalem had neglected the work of finishing the temple. Instead, they had become preoccupied with their own self-centered priorities. Now, the prophet reinforces his challenge to them, essentially saying in 2:10-14: Even though you are back in the holy land, that doesn’t make you a holy people. You need to put God and God’s business first, by returning to the task of rebuilding the temple. You need to obey God.

In 2:15-19, Haggai declares that because of the people’s sin and disobedience, they have suffered scarcity and deprivation. But verse 19 offers this word of hope: “From this day forward, I will bless you.” God promises through the prophet that, because of their faithful response to Haggai’s message, their future will be blessed.

The message for us today is clear. God calls us to live lives of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. This Biblical principle certainly applies to every Christian today. But as Christ followers, we take a new and different approach to the pursuit of obedience and faithfulness:

1. For Christ followers, salvation is not earned by our obedience and faithfulness. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8).

2. For Christ followers, obedience and faithfulness are the fruit, but not the means, of salvation. Good works don’t save us; faith does. But authentic faith will result in good works. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

3. As Christ followers, we have a new motivation to obey the Lord. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

4. As Christ followers, we have a new power to obey. Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).

5. As Christ followers, our lack of faithfulness need not leave us condemned and guilt-ridden. “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

6. As Christ followers, even when we are less than faithful, God keeps working with us to help us grow in Christ-likeness and faithfulness to God.
“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Thanks be to God.

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