

The book of Haggai is a marvelous lesson on how to get and keep the blessing and favor of the Lord. In utter simplicity the prophet Haggai outlines how God's children can live and walk under God's continual blessing and favor.

Yet Haggai also shows the causes and reasons why people lose God's blessing - and what they must do to come back into His favor! This is true for nations, families, individuals.

The wonderful truth is, God blesses those who walk in faithfulness - He shows favor to those who favor Him. I don't know about you, but I love to be around people who have the favor of God! There is something of the exuberance of Christ about them. And they have a settled peace. You don't have to worry from one day to the next whether they're up or down, because there is a steadiness about their walk with God.

One of the greatest sorrows a pastor has to bear, however, is to witness the awful changes that take place in Christians who go sour. These are believers who at one time were on fire for God, dedicated and zealous for His work. They were happy, blessed, growing in faith, maturing spiritually.

Then one day you began to sense that something had gone wrong. A frown had replaced their smile. Suddenly they'd stopped growing. Spiritual decay had set in!

This happens to married couples! Perhaps it is true of your marriage. Only a year or so ago, you both seemed so happy. There was a spark in your eyes, and you were sweethearts. Everywhere you turned God was blessing you. People around you thought nothing

How To Get and Keep the Blessing and Favor of God!

could ever come between you. You both enjoyed the fullness of God's favor.

But now something is wrong. In a matter of just months, you both are walking in sorrow! You can't agree on anything - there is constant misunderstanding between you. Your love for each other and for God's work is waning. His blessing and favor on your marriage has been withdrawn!

This also happens to individual Christians! I have been greatly blessed by the faithfulness and zeal of many individual Christians, many of whom are single. They're so full of joy, excited about the Word of God, always putting the Lord's work first, When I see them I say to myself, "There goes one who will never quit and never grow stale. He [or she] is determined to go all the way with the Lord!"

Yet, sadly, some of these zealous believers begin to change. They start missing meetings, whereas they used to come to every service. And a sad, dour look has swept over their countenance, The blessing of God is no longer there - you can almost see it draining out of them!

Now when I see them, I wonder, "Lord - what happened? How could they just drift away? How did such coldness get into their spirit? How could they forget the secret of

having Your blessing and favor upon them?"

The same thing happens to nations! From the day God commanded His blessings upon Israel, down to modern-day America - nations that once lived under bountiful goodness soon forget God! They forget why He blessed them - and they become His enemies, going from favor to awful judgments!

No nation was ever so blessed as Israel. God told them, "I picked you out of all the peoples of the nations - and I carried you in My arms! I found you, bathed and clothed you. But then you turned sour on Me! You turned against Me, committing spiritual adultery!"

Like Israel, America has lost God's blessing and favor! At one time this nation was greatly blessed. Our forefathers were, for the most part, Godly men. And up to just a few years ago, America blessed the whole world as the number-one lender nation. Not anymore! We are now the number-one debtor nation, owing more money than the rest of the world combined! We're so deep in debt we'll never get out!

What has happened to America? It has lost its soul, its blessing, its favor with God! No longer are we one nation under Him - because He has turned us over to our sins. We have become godless - and

now we are under His divine discipline!

1. Self-Interests Begin to Replace God's Interests!

"This people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built: (HAG 1:2). The Israelites gave up building the Lord's house - in order to build their own homes!

This scene took place sixty-eight years after Solomon's temple was destroyed. A remnant had returned to Jerusalem out of Babylonian captivity specifically to rebuild God's house. And, indeed, they laid the foundation of the temple with zeal and excitement!

But then they began running into some hard places - difficulties, discouragements. Slowly, they lost interest in the work of God. They said, "This just isn't the time - we're having too many problems. Besides, we're spending so much time here. We're neglecting our families and our businesses."

One by one, they walked away to look after their own interests. And the Lord's interests - which had everything to do with their own well-being - became secondary!

They began building their own houses. And they used the lumber that had been stored up to build the temple - all the beautiful cedar that had come from the mountainsides.

When Haggai came on the scene, he heard the pounding of nails and saw houses going up everywhere. Then he went by the house of God - and it was being neglected! Nobody was working on the temple!

He began to cry out: *"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?... Thus saith the Lord... Consider your ways"* (verses 4-5). He was saying, in other words, "Wake up - think about what you're doing!"

You might ask: What is the temple of God that is being built today? Scripture says it is our bodies: *"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"* (1.COR 6:19).

Indeed, the church of Jesus Christ is His body on earth. He is the Head, in glory - and our primary work here on earth is to build up His spiritual body. Everything we

do for Jesus doesn't just build up a local church or ministry - it builds up Christ's body on earth!

How, then, do believers today lose the blessing and favor of God? By stopping work on His temple! It happens when we stop praying and seeking God - when we stop building up His spiritual body!

Scripture says that if just one member hurts, the whole body suffers. I know if I bang my finger or stub my toe, my whole body reacts - even my head feels it! Therefore, if you're not doing your part in building Christ's house - if you're not seeking Him with all your heart - then you're hurting the whole body. You're even hurting the Head, Jesus!

Here is the problem Haggai points out: When the people put God's interests first, He provided their food and shelter. Indeed, they were cared for by Him in every way: Their vineyards grew, their grapes were heavy. They slept peacefully at night, and their children danced in the streets. None of their enemies prevailed against them. It was a marvelous time of God's blessing. But then the people became absorbed with their own interests!

Now, God is not against our providing for our household. We are to be diligent in our daily work and business. But the Israelites had stopped doing God's work completely. Self-interests had possessed their every thought!

Today, many Christians come to God's house and just sit. They never do anything to build His body. They're too concerned about their own careers and families - too busy with their own interests!

They say, "Someday I'll have time - then I'll be able to put the Lord's interests first. As soon as I've paid my bills and put aside a little nest egg, then I'll give more time to spiritual matters." No! These are lukewarm, even cold - giving God less and less of their time and resources!

Perhaps at one time you came to God's house with genuine zeal for Him. You were filled with Christ - He was your everything, your life. But now you have become wrapped up in making money, trying to improve your life-style. Suddenly, your interests have over-whelmed the interests of God. You have pushed His work out of your life!

God Says You Will Pay a High Price for Putting Self-Interests First!

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (HAG 1:6).

God was saying to the people: "You run after material things - houses, land, money - and they eat up all your time and energy! When you were consumed with doing My work, you had joy and satisfaction. But now you are empty, disillusioned, unsatisfied. And no matter what you do, nothing will ever satisfy you!"

"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" (verse 9).

God said, "You wanted it so badly and worked so hard for it. But you robbed from Me to get it! You brought it home, and it didn't satisfy you - because I blew all the satisfaction away!"

This is what is happening in America today! Think about it: Never in the history of mankind has there been a country of so many, with so much - with no satisfaction! You buy things you coveted and worked so hard to get - but as soon as you bring them home, all the newness wears off! It brings no joy, no satisfaction. You can actually feel the emptiness flowing into you!

Our nation is consumed with self - self-pride, self-ambition, self-will - with every person out for his own interests! No wonder so many are drunk and dazed with drugs, wandering in darkness and confusion. God has blown on our materialistic pursuits - and nothing of it can ever satisfy!

God says: *"I called for a drought upon [you]... upon all the labour of [your] hands"* (verse 11). He is saying, "If you begin to neglect your soul and turn to material things, you will end up joyless, dissatisfied, empty, dry! I will bring a spiritual drought - and all your hard work will only make you feel worse! You will say, 'Is that all there is to life?'"

To the carnal Christian, God is saying: "I've called for misery,

dryness, so you couldn't find any satisfaction - so it would drive you back to Me! I want you to put My interests first, so I can once again bless and favor you!"

Thank God, He does that! Each of us ought to pray, "Lord, anytime I start to slip away from You, make me miserable!"

Faithfully, God's Holy Spirit comes out to meet this believer every morning. And he invites him inside, whispering, "Welcome, friend. Let me show you something new today about God's righteousness."

2. The Second Reason People Lose God's Blessing and Favor: They Refuse to 'Give Up on Measuring Up'!

"The people did fear before the Lord... and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God" (1:12,14). Finally, the people were convicted of their self-interests and returned to working on the temple. They were back where they should be - building the house of God!

As they stood before the foundation of the temple, the walls started going up. But something was wrong - many of the older people began weeping! Why? Because they had seen the splendor of Solomon's temple sixty-eight years before - and this new one did not measure up. In comparison, it seemed as nothing!

They began to talk of past glory, saying, "This temple has no ark in it. There is no mercy seat, no cherubim. There is no consuming fire on the altar, no shekinah glory coming down on the house. After all our hard work - all our sacrifice and obedience, all our putting God's interests first - we don't measure up! This is nothing compared to what we once saw. Why struggle, why go on, when we see so little for all that we've done?"

The implications of this attitude were very serious - and it angered God! Haggai said to them: *"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?... Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"* (2:3). He was saying, "You're standing here measuring your present situation with something in the past - and it's making you miserable!"

This strikes at the very heart of what is happening in the church of Jesus Christ today. It is one of the

key reasons people have lost the blessing and favor of God!

A host of God's people today are giving up - because they don't think they will ever measure up! Like the Israelites, they have gone back to God back to putting Him first, seeking His will, building His house. But when they look at their lives, they say, "I have so little to show for all my struggles! I have so little of God's holiness, so little of His glory in my life. Compared to other Christians, I'll never measure up. What's the use of struggling? I'll never have victory."

I am convinced this is why many devoted Christians give up the fight. They compare themselves to other believers - and they become discouraged because they feel hopelessly inferior!

This happened to me years ago when I began reading the Puritan writers. I saw their holy fire for God - getting up at 4 and 5 in the morning, praying six and eight hours a day, never speaking a foolish word, consumed with the Word of God. They appeared so holy, so Godly. It sent me on a guilt trip - I felt I could never measure up to them!

Beloved, the problem is we have our eyes on our condition! We don't realize that, in the dealings of God in our lives, we're at just the right place. We can't measure our spiritual lives by somebody else's. If you continue to do this, you'll begin to think God's glory has depleted, that it has run out for you. You won't expect it in your life!

Haggai showed Israel they were focused on the wrong object. They had lost sight of the fact that God's glory hadn't been drained or depleted! God sent this word to them:

"I am with you, said the Lord of hosts... be strong, all ye people of the land... and work: for I am with you... my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not" (2:4-5). *"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts"* (verse 9).

God was saying to them, "You may have thought the glory of the first house was something. But it was nothing compared to the glory that's ahead! You'll have My peace upon you - My glory will flood your soul! Just stay in the precious fear of God. Keep going, keep doing My work, no matter how you feel. Be strong, for I am with you!"

If you'll just stand faithful - if you'll stay true to the Lord and not try to measure yourself by anything except your own love for Jesus - then you can be assured, you're growing. And God promises to be with you!

Haggai warned them, "I beg you - before you get discouraged about not measuring up, look back and review your past walk with God. Remember what it was like when you quit on God. You lost His favor and blessing! Do you want to go back to those days when God had to blast you with mildew? When He rained down the hail of disappointments on you, and all you did was in vain?"

"No - you have come back to the Lord, and you're on the right track! God is with you, no matter how little progress you think you're making. Keep going - the glory is just ahead!"

Then comes this incredible word from God:

"Consider now... this day... the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it [mark it down]... From this day will I bless you" (verses 15-19).

Beloved, you can mark this down too - it is God's promise to you! From the very hour you focus again on building up Christ's body - setting aside all selfish ways, letting Him become your all - you can start looking to see His manifold blessing. You can literally mark it down! You will know He is favoring you, smiling on you - rejoicing in you!

3. The Final Reason for Losing God's Blessing and Favor: The Touch of Death!

Jewish law had said: *"He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days... Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord"* (NUM 19:11, 13).

Now, listen to Haggai's word to Israel:

"Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and

that which they offer there is unclean" (HAG 2:13-14).

Haggai was saying, "If at any point death touches you or you touch death, you have become defiled. You're unclean - you have defiled your whole body, the temple of God!"

God had imposed these strict laws for health purposes, to protect the people against the spread of contagious diseases. Yet to the Jewish mind, death was always a type of corruption and Sin. Even the New Testament ties death to sin: *"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins"* (EPH 2:1).

According to Ezra and Nehemiah, the death touching Israel was sensuality and mixture with the world. Israelite men had lusted after heathen Canaanite women and married them. They had children who didn't even speak the Jewish language. There was an unholy mixture!

Beloved, if at any point in your Christian life you have a touch of the world - a tinge of compromise, a desire that's pulling at you - that is a touch of death And it's going to cost you the blessing and favor of God!

Haggai posed another question to the people:

"If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt to touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (HAG 2:12).

Haggai pictures a priest carrying home a cut of sanctified meat from the altar of sacrifice. The prophet asks: "Does that holy meat transfer holiness to his garment? When he puts it on his table at home, does it communicate holiness to any of the other food there?" The answer was an emphatic, "No!"

Here is Haggai's point: Being around holy things does not transfer holiness to you!

These Israelites thought the land itself was holy, so living on the land made them holy. Likewise today, many Christians convince themselves they are right with God as long as they come to His house. They think that through the sanctifying praise and prayers of God's people, somehow the holiness of God will be transferred to them.

Yet singing in the choir, doing good works, sitting at the Lord's table - none of these spiritual things in themselves can make you righteous. You can sit in a Holy Ghost meeting and soak in all the blessing of God - but it won't make you holy if death is touching you!

On the other hand, the death and corruption of sin are transferable. Sin is a communicable disease - it spreads to everything it touches! If sin is touching you at some point, it begins to spread through your whole body. Show me a man who is touching death somewhere in his life, and I'll show you how it has crept over his wife, his children, his entire household!

Here is why God shut off all His blessings upon Israel! It is why He struck them with blasting and mildew and brought disfavor, droughts, dissatisfaction, economic chaos, emptiness, poor harvests. It was because they were unclean before His altar! They had become careless about touching what was dead and they had become corrupt, wicked!

If there is something of the world in your heart - if the touch of death is not purified - you can have no blessing from God. You are in His disfavor - and all you do is unclean in His sight!

**Thank God - He Has Made
Provision for the Cleansing Of
Every Touch Of Sin!**

Are you battling a secret sin? Has that sin hindered the flow of God's blessing to you? Do you feel empty, dry, lonely? Listen to God's Word to you:

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins" (1.JN 2:1-2). *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1.JN 1:9).

If you want to be clean, run to Jesus! *"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace"* (EPH 1:7). *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses"* (COL 2:13).

New life and new blessings are yours - right now, in Christ! It doesn't take God long to clean it all up. Simply acknowledge before Him: "Lord, I have failed you. But I want it out - I want Your blessing!"

Call on His cleansing power. God will bring back to you all of His favor: *"A faithful man shall abound with blessings"* (PRO 28:20).

Dear saint, I urge you - determine in your heart not to look at the past. Become faithful once more, putting His interests first and seeking Him with all your heart. Start work again on the temple of the Holy Ghost. The Lord has promised you: "Mark it down on your calendar - from this day on I'm going to bless you. I'm going to favor you!"

Hallelujah!

by David Wilkerson
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