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Compromised

Haggai 1:2-11

Corrective Discipline, Judicial Discipline, and Corporate Discipline

Hebrews 12:5b-6a, "...[have you] forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons[?], 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines...'"

There is much to be said about the discipline the Lord gives to us as His children. First, it is

always motivated by love, "...for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines." Second, not all discipline is the same. For example, there are two types of discipline that God meets out to His children: Individual discipline and corporate discipline. Individual discipline comes in two forms:

- Corrective which God is always doing IN and AT all times in our lives.
- Judicial as in the formal discipline referenced in Matthew 18:15-20.

The second type of discipline is Corporate. When God organized His people into a formal entity — as in the theocratic nation called Israel — as a body-politic they now related to God on the basis of their national obedience. Speaking to the nation, God said this:

Leviticus 26:14-17, "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you."

The text continues like this for a long time. As a corporate body, their health and longevity were predicated upon their fidelity as a nation. If as a nation they proved faithful, they and the land in which they lived would be blessed. If as a nation they rebelled, then they and the land in which they lived would become quite sick. By way of note, today, the only corporate body that remains in a covenant relationship with God is the church — which has great implication in our study today.

Haggai concerns itself with the corporate discipline of the people of God as they existed NO LONGER as a nation, BUT as a distinct people in covenant with God. Consider:

1. They had a government, BUT they were not a nation.
2. They were an identifiable group, BUT they weren't exclusively Jewish (Gentiles could join them through conversion).
3. They still related to God as a corporate people to whom God sent prophets urging them unto corporate faithfulness (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).
4. And when they as a corporate body rebelled, in keeping with Leviticus 26 the land came under a curse!

Our study concerns itself with our responsibility as a corporate people in covenant with God. We begin with the setting.

Haggai 1:2, "Thus says the Lord of hosts¹, 'This people² says, "The time has not come, *even* the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.'""

This is a dramatic statement written to capture the hearts of the people of God. Notice that with Hebrew how a statement is made oft-times is as important and can be even more important than the words themselves. So, it is in this verse. It begins with the use of “redemptive” language, “...the time has not come...” Throughout the Bible this expression is associated with that sober moment in time when God does something big — either in judgment or salvation/redemption.³

Psalm 102:13, “Thou wilt arise *and* have compassion on Zion; for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come.”

This is the same expression in our text. Speaking of the downfall of Babylon, God said this:

Isaiah 13:22, “And hyenas will howl in their fortified towers and jackals in their luxurious palaces. Her *fateful* time also will soon come and her days will not be prolonged.”

This is essentially what Haggai told the people of God in his day. Speaking of the judgment that was soon to come upon Egypt, Jeremiah wrote this:

Jeremiah 26:21b, “...Woe be upon them, for their day has come, the time of their punishment.”

Speaking of the destruction of Judah, Ezekiel warned this:

Ezekiel 7:7a, “Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near...”

Accordingly, the language here — “the time has not come” — is NOT innocuous, BUT a statement packed with significance! The people of God were making the bold statement that redemptively it was NOT time to build the temple.

Now, did they understand the import of what they were saying prior to Haggai’s rebuke here? Most likely not! Yet when God/Haggai expressed it as He/he did here, they couldn’t miss the significance. Through their inactivity they were saying, “*It is NOT time to rebuild the Temple... but it is time to do something else!*” And what was that?

Haggai 1:3-4, “Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, ‘Is it time for you yourselves [lit. ‘you you’ which in the Hebrew is emphatic] to dwell in your paneled⁴ houses⁵ while this house *lies* desolate?’”

Again, this is redemptive language which makes this statement ludicrous. In God’s redemptive program, imagine God bringing His people to a salvific precipice and then saying, “*From all eternity I have ordained that now is the time to focus... on yourselves!*”

A good two hundred years prior to this time, God spoke to Isaiah of a Persian leader whom He would raise up, Cyrus! He would be:

- Designated as God's "shepherd",
- One who would "do [God's] desire", and
- One who would proclaim the Divine decree for God's people to build the temple.

Isaiah 44:28, "*It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'* And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"

Now as the people who went back were spiritually aware, mature, and the "spiritual Green Berets" of this generation⁶, they would have been familiar with Jeremiah 25:11 and the promise that God gave Jeremiah that the exile would last seventy years. They also would have been familiar with Isaiah 44:28. In fact, that most likely is why they heeded Cyrus' call in the first place (rather than viewing it as a trick).

From a biblical perspective (cf. Ezra 1:2), Cyrus' decree for the people of God to rebuild the temple was by the PERMISSION of a secular king, BUT BY the COMMAND of our Sovereign GOD! Accordingly, they returned because they understood that in God's redemptive program "It was time to rebuild the temple!"

Yet when they arrived and immediately faced massive opposition to their rebuilding efforts, their focus naturally turned to themselves, their living, and so their own well-being. When the suggestion was made that "*Today, we should begin on the temple rebuilding,*" their response was "Now is not the best time!" No doubt there were many excuses given.

- It's planting time... we don't have time to work on the temple.
- It is harvest time; so not yet!
- I just began a very important addition to my home; we've got another child on the way!
- Then there's the wedding feast the Rosenblatts are hosting!⁷

So truly, "*Now simply is just not the time to build the Temple.*" As such in this massive rebuke, Haggai/God reminded His people that redemptively "it was the time to rebuild"! And that brings us to a call to sobriety.

A Call to Sobriety

Haggai 1:5, "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Consider⁸ your ways!'" - while this most certainly would involve the people of God eventually looking at themselves to see what they were doing, yet that is NOT what at first is involved in "considering your ways".

The idea was for them to step back from their lives and look at the big picture. It speaks of a

spiritual vigilance which endeavors to look at the world through the eyes of the Lord! Pieter Verhoef wrote of this:

In the context these verbs concern the apprehension of the real meaning of the historical and eschatological 'events.' The same applies to the expression 'to set your hearts upon.' The people must consider, must give careful thought to, their circumstances and experiences, in order that they may deduce from them the correct conclusions. They must consider their situation and fate from the point of view of what God had wanted from and had intended for them. (Verhoef, 1987, p. 60)⁹

So, stepping back from their house projects and busy lives, God wanted them to consider this:

Haggai 1:6, "You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages¹⁰ *to put* into a purse with holes."

James Boice wrote of this:

Haggai's first remark (in v. 6) is that the people had "planted much" but had "harvested little." Since farming was their chief occupation, it is the equivalent of saying that they were always working. They were like the people in our day who take on extra jobs, who work through lunch and stay at the plant to work nights, who are always rushing around to get ahead. Yet little had come of it." (Boice, 2006, p. 470)

The word for "consider" is a major theme of this epistle (occurring in 1:5, 1:7; 2:15; 2:18 twice)- which is why Haggai returned to this same command in verse 7.

Haggai 1:7, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'"

Based on v. 6, this twice-repeated command called God's people to consider the impact that their corporate service had on the world in which they lived. As they did this, they would have turned to Deuteronomy 28 — a teaching they would all have known as it gave the stated reason for the exile from which they recently came!

Deuteronomy 28:2-6, "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will obey the Lord your God. Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country. Blessed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out."

Now compare that to this:

Deuteronomy 28:15-19, "But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to

observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out.”

As these returning exiles were the crème of the crop, they would have known these truths, BUT as of yet they had NOT put two plus two together until Haggai called them to step back a moment and “consider” their experience against the backdrop of the blessings and curses of the Covenant.¹¹ Why was the land suffering so? Because God had given them the calling to rebuild the temple and they ignored it!

Family of God, the blessings and curses of the Covenant are applicable to any corporate body in covenant with the Lord — which today is the church! If only the church in the America would wake up and “consider their ways”! How much longer must we suffer in a nation filled with conflict, drought, disease, natural disaster before we stop pointing the finger in our pride at non-Christians and with humility consider corporately our way before the Lord?

What would be that against we should “consider our way”? We might suggest many passages, but we could NOT go wrong considering our way against the exhortations Christ gave the seven churches of Revelation (2-3).¹² How does Bethel look (and the broader church) against:

- The church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) who struggled with a lack of love?
- The church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) who had a compromised pulpit?
- The church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) who endured unrepentant sin?
- The church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) who had apostatized?
- The church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) who approached God with a compromised worship?

In Haggai’s day it was it was their compromised worship that was the issue at hand. Haggai 1:8-9, “Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple¹³... *You* look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring *it* home, I blow it *away*. Why?’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.’”

Family of God you must see that this just wasn’t “The Issue” in Haggai’s generation. The issue here is the heart and soul of Christianity. In a day where we “worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship,” we have completely lost the priority that God places on worship — as did God’s people in Haggai’s day! Recall the reason God saved us was for His praise and glory.

Isaiah 43:6b-7a, “...bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory...”

The focus and passion of God when it comes to the people of this world is His worship.

John 4:23, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”

The essential definition of a Christian is one who worships.

Philippians 3:3a, “For we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus...”

As such, in and through all things our call is the worship, honor, and glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

No doubt that is why so much in the Bible revolves around worship.

- It took seven chapters (a total of 243 verses) for God to discuss all the standards, measurements, and elements of His worship. And yet, it only took thirty-one verses to describe the whole creation of the universe!
- The first sins revolved around worship: Adam (Genesis 3:1-7) and Cain (Genesis 4:3-5a),
- The first thing Noah did when he left the ark was to build an altar and worship the Lord, Genesis 8:20-22.
- One of the things that stands out about Abraham when he entered Canaan is that every place he stopped, he erected an altar to worship God, Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 22:9; 26:25.
- The purpose of the greatest redeeming act of the Old Testament — the Exodus — revolved around worship, “Let My son go, that he may [worship] Me...” (Exodus 4:23a)
- The encampment of Israel during the 40 years of wandering placed the tabernacle in the center (cf. Numbers 1:52-2:2)! God was teaching them that worship is central to life!
- A brief overview of the Psalter shows that its primary focus is on worship, cf. Psalm 5:4, 11; 18:2-3a; 22:26b-28; 29:1-2; 30:4; 31:23-24; 32:11; 33:1-5; 34:1-3; 40:1-3; 43:3-4; 47:1-4, 4-5, 6-7; 64:9-10; 67:3-5; 68:3-4, 4-5, 32-33; 81:1-3; 86:8-10; 89:5-8; 92:1-2; 95:1-3, 5-6, 6-7a; 96:1-3, 7-10, 12; 98:1-3; 100:1-3; 103:19-22; 104:1; 105:1-4; 106:1-2; 107:1-3; 111:1-3; 112:1; 113:1-3; 117; 118:1-4; 124:6-8; 134:1-3; 135:1-3; 138:1-2; 145:3-4, 21; 146:1-2, 5-6; 147:1, 4-5, 7, 12-13; 148:1-2, 13-14; 149:1-2; 150:1-2, 6.
- The central theme of Christ’s ministry was seeking true worshipers (John 2:13-17; Matthew 4:10).
- And the theme of heaven and eternity will be worship (cf. Revelation 4:10-11; 5:14; 11:15b-17a; 14:6-7; 15:4; 19:4, 10a; 22:8-9)

From all of this you must see that the worship of God — our corporate worship — is one of the

most important things God has given us as a people and a church regardless of the nation in which we live. And yet, our generation like Haggai's have fallen here. Over a century ago in a sermon titled, "Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats?" Charles Spurgeon said this:

An evil is in the 'professed' camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most shortsighted Christian can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years this evil has developed at an alarming rate. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments! The devil has seldom done a more clever thing, than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. (Spurgeon, 2021)

Archibald Brown made this observation:

Jesus pitied sinners, pleaded with them, sighed over them, warned them, and wept over them; but He never sought to amuse them! When many of His disciples turned away, because of the searching nature of His preaching, I do not find there was any attempt to bring them back, by resorting to something more pleasant to the flesh. I do not hear Him saying, 'We must keep up the gatherings at any cost! So run after the people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow!' (Brown, 2006)

Christian, don't miss it! What the church does when it gathers on Sunday is NOT about them — their likes, dislikes, or preferences! It is NOT about outreach or converting non-Christians. RATHER, it is about the reverent and proper worship of God!

Why in Haggai's day was the land cursed as well as the productivity of God's people? Why in our day has the once bright, shiny nation of the US become so tarnished? The answer is one and the same: The worship of God had and has become a secondary priority! That having been said, notice what should be the focus when it comes to worship.

Isaiah 1:8b, "...that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord."

The language here is reminiscent of the instruction God gave His people in Leviticus as to His worship where He spoke of a "pleasing sacrifice" or a "soothing aroma" (e.g., Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17).¹⁴ Our highest call in worship is NOT our pleasure and praise, BUT God's! And the focus is NOT on being inspired or built up, BUT on ascribing to God His worth. That is what is meant by "glorifying God" in the passage.

As you know, the word for "glory" (כְּבֹד [kabad]) is the word for heaviness, weight, or that which has substance! To glorify God in the context of worship is to express God's worth to Him in the manner He desires!

I hope you see that this priority has never changed! Proper worship is at the heart and soul of Christianity! Yet this is what God's people had compromised in 520 BC when Haggai gave this prophecy! Their personal, individual lives had become more important than His worship! And

the Consequence was devastating...

The Consequence

Haggai 1:10-11, “Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.”

Again, this was in fulfillment of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. God closed out this message with a statement which the people couldn't miss: The drought that had hit the Land of Palestine was because of the infidelity of His people when it came to His worship! In fact, the Hebrew contains a pun here which is quite illustrative. The word for “drought” is חֶרֶב (*choreb*) and the word for “desolate”/“ruin” — which was the state of the temple (vv. 4, 9) — is חָרַב (*chareb*).

If in our life the worship of God is tangential — unimportant, unattended or offered in deference to man and not God — what will be the result? The land in which we live will become very “dry”!

If as a church we shortchange God's worship, God will shortchange the land in which we live

So how do we respond? To what would God call everybody with whom He is in covenant? Nothing less than repentance.

=2 Chronicles 7:13-14: “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”¹⁵

Let me ask you: In your estimation has the pandemic brought God's church to its knees in prayer? Has any “sign of the times” done that in recent memory? We have been quick to criticize, acquiesce, and even rebel... but what about repentance?

- This past year, has the church in America taken any blame for the pandemic?
- Has it humbled itself and prayed?
- Has it considered its worship against God's word?
- Its teaching? Its submission to the Lord?
- Its faithfulness to the Lord?

If our government officials had any understanding of this, far from banning us from worship,

they would have appealed to the church to clean up its act and worship the Lord aright!

Restoration is the focus of the discipline in the text before. As God's people neglected the call of God to rebuild the temple — as they focused on their own needs and not the proper worship of God — God struck the land that His people might wake up and repent — for as they/we do this, they/we will be at our best!

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End Note(s)

¹ “The momentous significance of this title must be evaluated against the historical background. The emperor of Persia had at that time sovereign sway over his vast empire, including the minor province of Jerusalem-Judah. The emperor's word was law, even to the Jewish community. Now, however, another word was conveyed to them, the word of the Lord Almighty, he being the highest and the most absolute Potentate in the whole universe, including the Persian empire!” (Verhoef, 1987, pp. 52-53)

² ““These people’ represent the opposite party in a lawsuit, and the reference is judicially valid even though the party itself is absent. With the expression ‘these people’ the Lord indicates his displeasure with them. Their sentiment was contrary to the will of God and to the best interests of his people. The use of the perfect tense indicates that what they have said in the past was still in vogue at that time.” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 54)

³ Cf. also Psalm 119:26; Jeremiah 46:21; 50:31; 51:33; Ezekiel 7:7, 12; 16:8; 23:3.

⁴ “Many scholars translate *səpûnîm* in Hag 1:4 as ‘paneled’ and associate that translation with luxury. In these instances, the paneling is believed to be refined or expensive wood associated with the temple or palaces (cf. 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3, 7; Jer 22:14). Other scholars translate *səpûnîm* as ‘covered, roofed,’ noting the argument in Haggai as a decisive reason for their translation. Wolff argues that cedar was the type of wood needed for the structural elements of the temple and palaces and does not in itself denote luxury. Perhaps the dominant imagery in the context of Haggai 1:4 is the relative completeness of the houses, thus favoring ‘roofed’ as the translation but reserving the idea of luxury as a possible nuance of the argument.” (Jacobs, 2017, p. 44)

⁵ “We agree with some scholars that we must not overestimate the general conditions of the dwellings at that time. The people were experiencing adverse economical circumstances; Jerusalem seemed to have had only a small number of inhabitants (Zech. 1:16), even seventy-five years later (Neh. 7:4). The

point of the argument, however, is that the people have exerted themselves literally to 'run' on behalf of their own houses (v. 9), while nothing was done to rebuild the temple." (Verhoef, 1987, p. 59)

⁶ "The 'remnant' to whom the message was given was composed of Israelites who were distinguished by special devotion to the Lord. It was their devotion to him, and their zeal for his house, that was the cause of their separation from the mass of their brethren who remained behind in Babylon. They were, therefore, a choice company of people. They had been separated for a purpose of great importance; for the direct line of God's dealings was to continue with them to the coming of Christ... They were characterized by affection and zeal for God's house, and this is a great thing in his sight. Not only so, but, in pursuit of that object, they had voluntarily turned away from all the magnificence, grandeur and luxury of Babylon, where, after a long residence, the people of God had become thoroughly domesticated. They had faced trials and difficulties in crossing the intervening territory, and the result of all their efforts and hardships was but to bring them to a desolated land and a ruined city. So their devotion and zeal for the Lord's interests had been fully proved. There was nothing to attract them to that land and to that city except the fact that it was God's holy land, and the city which he had chosen to put his name there." (Philip Mauro, *The Last Call to the Godly Remnant: A Study of the Five Messages of Haggai*, pp. 3, 4)

⁷ "According to these people the time for rebuilding the temple was inconvenient. They do not doubt the necessity of rebuilding the temple or their obligation to rebuild it. Their argument concerns the aspect of timing only. According to them- and on this they were all agreed- this momentous task must be postponed a little. The present circumstances prevent them from doing what surely has to be done. The time is just not ripe." (Verhoef, 1987, p. 55)

⁸ "Consider" is one of Haggai's characteristic expressions (2:15, 18 twice, as well as twice in these verses).

⁹ Pieter Verhoef further wrote, "The real point in the prophet's appeal to the people to consider their ways (v. 5) is to remind them of the vertical dimension in their relationship to God, and to urge them to relate their present malaise to the covenantal sanction in the form of God's judgment." (Jacobs, 2017, p. 63)

¹⁰ "Though minted coins were in use to a limited extent in this period (Ezra 2:69), it is unlikely that a workman's wages would be paid in coinage as early as this. The money bags referred to would contain wedges or discs of copper or silver, approximately defined in value, but since forgery was not unknown, and metal was often panned away, it was necessary to weigh out the sum for each transaction (cf. Zech. 11:12, where the shekels of silver still had to be weighed out)." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 44)

¹¹ By way of note, this is no different from what Christ commanded when He called to His disciples, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation..." (Matthew 26:41a)

¹² I have omitted the persecution church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) and the faithful church of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13).

¹³ "It was customary to set layers of wood in stone walls to minimize earthquake damage (cf. Ezra 5:8); this wood, and heavy timber, long enough to stretch from wall to wall of the temple to support the roof, would probably have to be imported (Ezra 3:7)." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 44)

¹⁴ "The word is used when a priest declares a sacrifice to be acceptable to God, a sacrifice with which God is pleased. Even when the objects of God's pleasure are people and not sacrifices, they mostly concern people who are bringing their offerings to the Lord. In Deuteronomy 33:11 Moses beseeches the Lord to be pleased with the work of Levi's (or the priesthood's) hands, presupposing their sacrificial ministry. According to Hos. 8:13 the Lord will not be pleased with Ephraim, although they offered sacrifices to the Lord. In Ezek. 20:40 the Lord promised to accept Israel, requiring of them their offerings. In Mal. 1:8 God's pleasure (actually displeasure) concerns priests and people because of their offerings." (Verhoef, 1987, p. 67)

¹⁵ Cf. also Amos 4:6-9.