



Daily Verse and Comment

Ezekiel 22:26

(26) Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known *the difference* between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

New King James Version

The word *profane* has become rare these days. Its full meaning has disappeared from common conversation, and it is now used almost exclusively with regard to language—as in *profanity*. But obscene or vulgar speech—as common as it is—is only a fraction of what is contemplated by *profane*.

The word came into English through French from the Latin *profanus*, and its root is quite revealing. It consists of *pro-* (before, meaning "against" or "away from") and *fanum* ("temple"). Something that is *profane*, then, is literally "against the temple" or even "far from the temple." Biblically, "temple" refers not just to a physical building, but embodies all that takes place there—specifically, the true worship of the true [God](#). Thus, not only can foul words and phrases be "far from the temple"—far from the true worship of God—but also people, behaviors, and even instruments of worship can be profane.

Profane may not be an especially common word in the Bible, but wherever it appears, it contains a tremendous amount of gravity. When God warns against profaning something of His (such as His name, Sabbaths, sanctuary, altar, ordinances, etc.), He uses forceful and firm statements to convey His seriousness. Why is God so concerned that His people be vigilantly careful with what He designates as clean and unclean, holy and unholy, or appropriate and profane?

These designations define His nature, character, and way of life. Just as a parent teaches a child what is good and what is not—so the child will grow up mirroring the values of the parent—so God instructs His children in what is proper and what is not. Without this divine designation, and the accompanying warnings, we would be left to our own devices and would certainly not mirror the values of our Father (see [Proverbs 29:15](#)). To be unconcerned with what God defines as acceptable is to be unconcerned with God Himself.

How serious is God? He establishes the death sentence for profaning the [Sabbath](#) by working on it ([Exodus 31:14](#)). He killed Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, for offering profane fire—fire that had its source in human effort rather than divine causation ([Leviticus 10:1-2](#)). He proclaims punishment and disaster on prophets and priests who are profane ([Jeremiah 23:11-12](#), 15-17). Because of profaning God's Sabbaths, the Israelites received God's fury and anger and were scattered among the Gentiles ([Ezekiel 20:15-24](#); [22:6-16](#)). Even after being scattered, they continued to profane His name—something that continues today ([Ezekiel 36:16-38](#); [39:7-8](#)). Clearly, the issue of what is "far from the temple" is not a minor one to God.

[Ezekiel 44:23-24](#) foretells of a time when God's priests—teachers, leaders—"shall teach My people [Israel] the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. . . . They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths." But this time is clearly yet future. Right now, we are in a time more accurately described in [Ezekiel 22:26](#).

These things can be clearly seen in the common Western rejection of the Sabbath in favor of [Sunday worship](#); in the syncretism—mixing of holy and profane—of [Christmas](#) and [Easter](#); and in the scoffing at the designations of clean and unclean—acceptable and profane—food. In the [Israelitish nations](#), hardly any thought is given to living a holy life, even though our Savior clearly tells us, "Be holy, for I am holy" ([Leviticus 11:44-45](#); [19:2](#); [20:7](#); see [I Peter 1:15-16](#)). The author of Hebrews exhorts us, "Pursue [peace](#) with all people, and [holiness](#), *without which no one will see the Lord*" ([Hebrews 12:14](#); emphasis ours).

The church of God has an even greater responsibility to distinguish between the clean and the unclean—the holy and the profane—than the physical peoples of Israel. To whom much is given, from him much is required (see [Luke 12:48](#)). We are called to be lights to [the world](#) and witnesses of God and [Jesus Christ](#). Our attention to upholding God's designation of holiness while shunning the profane directly influences how much we resemble God, and the degree to which we resemble God will determine our success in being true and faithful witnesses of Him.

In [Haggai 2:10-14](#), God explains that when a people are defiled—unclean, profane—all the works of their hands and their worship of Him are likewise unclean. This is given in the context of the building of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua.

God teaches us that holiness is not transferable—but uncleanness is. Having a holy human leader or a holy spouse, friend, or neighbor, will not make us holy. However, our contact with the profane *will* contaminate us, and the work of our hands will become unfit for His service.

God requires those whom He has called into His service to be holy—because *He* is holy—and to distinguish between the holy and unholy, the unclean and the clean, for by so doing we will come to know *Him*.

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[The Holy and the Profane](#)

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