



"The reason the church is failing to effectively invade the world is because the world has invaded the church."

—Anonymous

22-Dec-06

The Holy and the Profane

We do not often hear the word *profane* 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 is used, it contains a tremendous amount of gravity. When God warns against profaning something of His (such as His name, His Sabbaths, His

sanctuary, His altar, His 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? Because these designations define His nature, His character, and His 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](#):

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.

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](#)).

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, 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:

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?'" Then the priests answered and said, "No." And Haggai said, "If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean." Then Haggai answered and said, "'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.'"

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

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Holiness \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Taking God's name in vain is far more serious than swearing or profanity. To appropriate the name of God means to represent His attributes, character and nature. God's names are the signposts or revelators of His nature and descriptors of His activities. The glory of God was revealed through Christ by what He said and did- His entire repertoire of behavior. Our daily behavior, likewise, must imitate Christ just as Christ's behavior revealed God the Father. Behaving in a Godly manner enables us to know God and live a quality life. The third commandment has to do with the quality of our personal witness to everything the name we bear implies. Profaning or blaspheming God's name implies living in a manner inconsistent with God's name.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Is the Christian Required To Do Works? \(Part Six\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

It is a given that works cannot earn us salvation. However, they play many

vital roles in our Christian walk toward the Kingdom of God. In this concluding article, John Ritenbaugh gives specific reasons for doing good works, showing their close relationship with holiness.

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