

“The Worship of Fools – Part 2”
Ecclesiastes 5:1-7
(Preached at Trinity, July 23, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Solomon has been observing the various occupations of life on the earth. He has directed attention to our labors, to the extent of human wisdom, to all of the human pleasures and possessions, and he comes to the same conclusion. If God is not at the center of all things it is all futile. Life is empty and vain.
2. Now as we come to **Chapter 5** Solomon prescribes the only solution to all the vanities of life. It is the worship of the one true God.
Psalms 111:10 NAU - "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever."
3. Solomon is speaking of religious people. These people are going up to the house of God.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 NAU - "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God"
They are offering sacrifices, praying, and making vows.
4. Solomon is telling us that even our worship can be futile and vain.
Many find comfort in acts of worship, but worship can be an empty, worthless endeavor. It can be outward formality without the holy reverence of God.
Isaiah 29:13 NAU - "Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me"
Notice Solomon uses the word “fool” three times in **Verses 1-4**.
I title this morning's sermon, “The Worship of Fools.”
5. This has always been a danger. It was a danger in Solomon's day. It remains a danger today. In general, the church today has lost its reverence for God. Approaching God is no longer seen as a weighty thing. We worship according to our personal tastes and personal preferences with little regard to what God wants. God is not the focus.
Solomon warns we must be cautious as we approach God in worship. Approaching God is not something to be taken lightly.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 NAU - "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God"
6. The worship and reverence of God is the solution for the emptiness of life. But when our worship is lacking in holy reverence it too becomes futile and vain. It's religion at its worst. It is simply being churchy without ever getting around to worshipping God in holy reverence. As Solomon says in **Verse 4** God takes no delight in fools.
7. Solomon has in mind Old Covenant worship, but these are timeless truths. God will forever be approached with holy reverence.
Solomon divides it into several areas:
 - I. Take heed in how you hear the Word of God and make sacrifices – Verse 1
 - II. Take heed in how you pray – Verses 2-3
 - III. Take heed in making vows – Verses 4-6

8. Last time we focused on the first. Israel's worship had degenerated into mere formalism.
- A. True worship was replaced by empty religion void of God.
Outward actions can never replace a true reverence for God. God is able to look upon the heart. He condemns empty worship.
- B. Solomon admonishes us to come to worship ready to hear the Word of God.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 NAU - "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen" - שָׁמָע *shama*
We must come prepared to hear and heed. We need ears that are ready to receive. We need hearts of submission, hearts of obedience.
9. In **Verses 2-3** Solomon adds a second important aspect of approaching God.
- I. Take heed in how you pray.
- A. Solomon commands us to guard against coming to God with empty words spoken without thought.
Ecclesiastes 5:2 NAU - "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God."
1. Prayer is one of the high privileges of God's children.
Our Heavenly Father invites His children to come before His throne. He embraces them, hears them, cares for them, loves them.
He has given His Spirit to His children.
Romans 8:16-17 NAU - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"
Romans 8:26-27 NAU - " In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God.*"
 2. Most today give little regard to this privilege. They pretend that it is a small thing to come before God. So they seldom avail themselves of the privilege.
 - a. Unbelievers cannot pray at all.
I say this carefully. Of course, all who call upon Christ in repentance will be heard. But those who request the bounty of God's blessings without any desire to submit to Him as God are praying in vanity and futility. They enjoy God's common grace but know nothing of the blessings of God's grace upon His elect.
 - b. We should also teach our unbelieving children how to pray, pressing upon their little hearts the graciousness of Christ and their need to trust and follow Him. But their accountability rises as they continue to resist the call of the Gospel.
 3. We should understand that sin will hinder our prayers. We will never lose our union with Christ, but sin will surely effect our communion with Him. This is Peter's meaning.
1 Peter 3:7 NAU - "You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."

Simon Kistemaker writes: “God does not accept prayers that husband and wife offer in an atmosphere of strife and contention. He wants them to be reconciled so that they are able to pray together in peace and harmony and thus enjoy untold divine blessings.”¹

- B. Our prayers can also be hindered by our approach to prayer
1. By praying seldom, knowing little of the battlefield of prayer.
One of the weaknesses of the modern church and contemporary Christians is their lack of prayer. Is that one of the reasons so few are being saved, why our culture is so spiritually bankrupt, why the church is so impotent? God’s people are not praying.
 2. By speaking vain, repetitious, empty words thinking that the more we talk the more God will listen. In a world where everyone is quick to speak and slow to hear, we must never forget it is more important to listen than to speak. We must be willing to allow the Word of God to instruct us. James gives us wisdom -
James 1:19 NAU - "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak . . ."
 - a. It was D. L. Moody who said, “Some men’s prayers need to be cut short on both ends and set on fire in the middle.”²
 - b. This is not to condemn all lengthy prayers. Rather, it condemns empty, thoughtless praying.
Matthew Henry – “This does not condemn all long prayers; Christ prayed all night; and we are directed to *continue in prayer*. But it condemns careless heartless praying, *vain repetitions* (Mt. 6:7). Let us speak to God, and of him, in his own words, words which the scripture teaches; and let our words, words of our own invention, be few, lest, not speaking by rule, we speak amiss.”³
 3. By failing to consider the matter of prayer – to take time to adore God, to hold Him in holy reverence – “Our Father which art in heaven”
Ecclesiastes 5:2 NAU - "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few."
 4. By praying without any expectation of God arriving in His infinite wisdom and power.
James 4:3 NAU - "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures."

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, vol. 16, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 125.

² Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 115.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1039.

III. Take heed in making vows.

- A. Vow making in the Old Covenant was important.
1. Vows were promises of commitment before God. They were to never be an effort to bribe God. Rather they were sincere desires to receive from God that which would be to His glory.
 2. Solomon is stressing that the payment of one's vow must not be delayed.
Ecclesiastes 5:4 NAU - "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it"
 3. We can see an example with Hannah when she vowed to God if He gave her a child she would dedicate it to God's service. When Samuel was born she fulfilled her vow.
1 Samuel 1:28 NAU - "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD."
 4. A vow must not be made hastily, without careful consideration of the ability to keep it.
This was the great sin of Jephthah when his vow resulted in the death of his only child.
Ecclesiastes 5:5 NAU - "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."
 5. One can never claim his vow was a mistake.
Ecclesiastes 5:6 NAU - "Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake."
- B. We still make vows in the New Covenant.
1. Our Confession devotes a lengthy chapter to the subject of oaths and vows.
 2. We must consider all of the pledges we make before both God and man.
Marriage is a vow of a lifetime of love and fidelity.
James reminds us of the importance of fulfilling our promises.
James 5:12 NAU - "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment."
 3. Our Church Covenant is a series of vows – promises we make to one another:
I do now in the presence of God most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with this local assembly, as one body in Christ.
 4. If we make a vow we must consider it carefully. Once made, it must not be violated.
Numbers 30:2 NAU - "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."
 5. The nature of our Christian profession is vow of commitment to Christ.
We follow Him.
We aren't saved by what we do. We are saved by trusting what Christ did. But the nature of faith is a change of heart that leads us to follow Jesus. We profess our absolute submission to His lordship.
Paul states, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"

6. We are called upon to confess Christ. Confessing Christ with our mouth is our vow to follow Him. We are confessing Him as Lord. Faith without confessing Christ is a barren faith. Confessing Christ without following Him is a false confession.
We profess Him as both Savior and Lord.
7. To vainly take upon ourselves the name "Christian" without submitting to the Lordship of Christ is to take His name in vain. It is to make a vow without keeping it. Multitudes today profess to be followers of Christ, but they are liars.
1 John 2:4-5 NAU - "The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:"
Titus 1:16 NAU - "They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed."
8. We have vowed to follow Christ above all else.
We have vowed to keep His commandments.
The nature of genuine repentance is a turning from sin and a striving after Christ in obedience.
9. We have also vowed to carry the Gospel to the world
The Gospel has been entrusted to us.
John Murray – "Evangelism is the responsibility of all who confess the name of Jesus. Indeed it belongs to this confession. For a confession that does not bear witness to the saving power and claims of the Lord Jesus is the one that belies its reality. Nothing less than the discipling of all nations is the demand of Jesus' lordship."⁴

Conclusion:

1. Solomon is warning about mere religion of human invention. In **Verse 7** he declares the emptiness of religion without God at the center.
Ecclesiastes 5:7 NAU - "For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God."
2. The best religious reforms of the lost man are only partial reforms. He vows to give only what his flesh is willing to part with but keeps his true treasures safely tucked away in his bosom.
3. Offering sacrifices is easy. God wants hearts of love and obedience. God wants us to present ourselves a living sacrifice.
Ecclesiastes 5:4 NAU - "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for *He takes* no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!"
4. The right worship of God is the one and only solution to the emptiness of existence upon the earth. "fear God."
It means to stand in awe of God in holy reverence. That describes the life of a Christian.

⁴ John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 240.