

**ECCLESIASTES**  
**Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**  
**“From Feet to Fear”**  
**March 24, 2024**

**Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**

**Guard your steps** when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. <sup>2</sup> Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. <sup>3</sup> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool’s voice with many words.

<sup>4</sup> When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? <sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; **but God is the one you must fear.** <sup>1</sup>

This is God’s Word.

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After four chapters of the writer of Ecclesiastes, most likely Solomon, declaring that all of life is vanity based on his own experiences and all that he has seen “under the sun” we hit what can be considered a high point. It is a high point in that this is the transitional moment in the book where we go from vanity to reverence. He moves from “reflective journaling” to “sermonizing.” In other words, he is moving from first-person to second person writing. His observations revealed with “I saw,” and “I considered” words shift to “You do…” commands.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ec 5:1–7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> Farmer, Kathleen A. *Who Knows What Is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: International Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 167.

The structure of this section is common Hebrew poetry. There is an opening command followed by a reason then followed by a proverbial illustration. The final verse is the punch line, what Hebrew Bible scholars call the law of end stress.<sup>3</sup>

If you were to title this sermon, a simple one could be “From Feet to Fear.”

Feet referencing the first verse with the command to “guard your steps” or in other words, “Walk wisely.”

That would be one bookend to this sermon. Looking at the last phrase in the passage, the “law of end stress” as I mentioned is to “fear God.”

The words of this passage may be some of the most ignored by Christians today. The “Christotainment” that has become common in far too many churches has led one commentator to declare that we live in the one of the most sacrilegious cultures in the history of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

We know that other generations throughout church history had their own troubles. Abhorrent practices such as slavery were ignored, if not outright celebrated in the nineteenth century and prior. Christians printing Bibles for the masses were martyred in centuries past. In the New Testament, James criticized church members who were showing favoritism toward the rich. Paul addressed the drunks at the Lord’s Supper in Corinth. Jesus the whip-maker turned over tables and showed his wrath to those making profits on the pilgrims to Jerusalem. The Old Testament prophets continually called out hypocrites who simply went through the motions of worship through sacrificing.<sup>5</sup> The fleecing of the poor was happening at times as well as the introduction of pagan worship in God’s temple.

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<sup>3</sup> O’Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Ecclesiastes: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 113.

<sup>4</sup> O’Connell, 107.

<sup>5</sup> O’Connell, 108.

So, every generation has its troubles and to ignore them is to replicate them, to our own demise.

As we read chapter five of this book, Preacher Solomon called out the sin that was justified by many. Yet, be not dismayed at what seems like a litany of negativism. This turn toward the redemptive role of God among his people is powerful. It is the loving shake back to reality that the followers of God needed in Solomon's day and thankfully, due the love and grace of our Father, speaks to us now.

Solomon is speaking to a congregation of Israelites who were living under the law...living in the preface to the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, the house of the Lord is not the building where the local church gathers such as this, but the Temple in Jerusalem. The same temple where sacrifices for the people were made, where priests fulfilled their duties, where offerings were collected, and where God's presence resided. There are so many temple stories in the Old Testament, such as when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. Yet, in this instance, the work being done by God's people "under the sun" had slid so severely into routine that the people were as guilty then as many Christians are today of minimizing the value of worshipping together, the gathering of the people of God, and corporate oneness of God's family.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism has been recited since the mid-1600s and while you may not be familiar with it, you likely have heard the opening question and response.

***Question:*** "What is the chief end of man?"

***Answer:*** "Man's chief end is to glory God, and to enjoy him forever."<sup>6</sup>

However, in recent years popular church leaders with large followings have said that we do not worship God *for* God, but for ourselves. This

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<sup>6</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, 1646-1647.

absurd statement that will sell books, fill stadiums, cause emotional responses, and become the mantra for a new version of church is a total reversal of this catechism and more importantly flies in the face of biblical truth. Contemporary, post-modern, cultural Christianity seems to be saying that God's chief end is to glorify man and enjoy him forever.<sup>7</sup>

How did we get here?

From the Holy Spirit's inspiration, we have the words penned by the Preacher sustained and saved for centuries as God's unchanging and without error or mistake word to his church. What must we be aware of here? What does this passage say in regard to the version of Christianity that seems to be growing in our nation? How must we worship well? The steps seem simple, but sometimes it is the simple that is most often forgotten.

To God's people, the command, followed by the reasonings are:

- 1. ENTER CAREFULLY**
- 2. LISTEN CLOSELY**
- 3. SPEAK CLEARLY**

Yes, the order matters.

### **ENTER CAREFULLY**

#### **Ecclesiastes 5:1a**

#### **Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.<sup>8</sup>**

The command is to guard or watch one's step when going into the house of God. In Proverbs, Solomon uses feet as a graphic symbol of human conduct. This is about walking wisely, being extra careful about where your feet take you. Solomon is stating that going to the temple is right. It

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<sup>7</sup> Akin, Daniel L. and Jonathan Akin. Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 61.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ec 5:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

is wise. It is what those who take the right track do.<sup>9</sup> This is understood and the wise go to the house of God. Yet, the warning is clear – guard your steps.

The warning is a command. As you walk into the temple to worship God...don't do so casually. The instruction is to be cautious as one enters in the presence of God. Now, in the New Testament Jesus eradicates the distinction between places the religious people defined as sacred and profane. This demolition only occurred after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, in the Old Testament, the places of sacredness were very much still in place.<sup>10</sup> Thus, to enter the temple haphazardly without an attitude of worship was to walk in as if wearing a cloak of sin, proudly displaying it for all to see, without any embarrassment, humility, or apology.

But, we don't have a temple. We are the temple. So, what does this mean for the church today? Coming together in worship as the church, being the body of Christ and thus embodying the temple is no less a time of reverence and reflection.

So, guard your feet. Watch your step. Be very careful to not miss the why of our gathering while focusing on the what you expect.

## **LISTEN CLOSELY**

### **Ecclesiastes 5:1b**

**To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.<sup>11</sup>**

Listen. Perhaps the most forgotten and forsaken portion of Sunday worship in the American church – the quiet that precedes the prayer.

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<sup>9</sup> Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 203.

<sup>10</sup> Longman, Tremper III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 150.

<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ec 5:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Some of you think Simon and Garfunkel were the originators of the “Sound of Silence” but as we read Solomon’s words here, we are confronted with the command, not the suggestion mind you, to listen.

In the temple, Israel was to listen first. As Christians, we know and appreciate through Jesus’ death, that God judged the temple and replaced it. There is no temple in Jerusalem now. End-times students spend way too much time on the potential rebuilding while perhaps missing that Christians, being under the new covenant in Christ’s blood have a perfect and permanent sacrifice and intercessor for our sins. Thus, we need no temple building. Jesus IS the temple we go through to rightly worship God, and in him WE bcome the temple of the living God.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we too should guard our steps and do as James stated in his letter, “be quick to hear, slow to speak.” (James 1:19).

To quote Aaron Burr in the musical Hamilton “Talk less.”

### **SPEAK CLEARLY**

There are things we must say. There are promises made. Vows taken. So much is found in these seven verses that speak so loudly to us today. We are to be grounded in reality, not in the dreams of fantasy, as Solomon references in verses 3 and 7.

We do speak, but we had better slow down a bit and think about what we say. When we sing hymns and spiritual songs, what are we saying?

- *“I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.”*
- *“All to Jesus I surrender...”*
- *“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, oh take and seal it with thy Spirit from above.”*

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<sup>12</sup> O’Donnell, 115.

- *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul. Worship his holy name. Sing like never before, O my soul, I’LL WORSHIP your holy name.”*

If we sing these songs and promise God something in the lyrics but never do what is promised, is that not akin to making a vow and not keeping it?

God is not impressed with our shows of emotion or our ability to sing along. He is not impressed with well-worded invocations or prayers that sound like Shakespearean soliloquies. Ultimately, God is not impressed with us. But he loves us.

Based on what we read here; he takes our vows seriously. Vows were made in the temple by the people of the day. They were made before God and were expected to be kept. The messengers of the temple were even sent out to the people who made vows and failed to keep them. There was no “I didn’t mean it” or “I was misunderstood” moments.

Thus, when parents stand before their church family with their little babies and dedicate them to the Lord and publicly make a vow to raise the little one in a home that honors God and values the church and all that it entails, God expects that to matter. Even twelve to fifteen years later when travel ball schedules come out.

The husband and wife who vow to remain faithful to one another until death comes, is not simply entering a legal contract, but for Christians it is a sacred vow to God. Certainly, there are times biblically when divorce is allowed, but even then, it is saturated in sinfulness, if not by both spouses, certainly by one.

In the current state of evangelical church membership, the vows of the member for unity in the body, the doctrinal integrity, the one another commands, encouragement of the saints, and the support through service and generous giving and living are often ignored. Somewhere along the

line, church membership lost its vow, though it still exists, even if ignored.

But don't misread that. Solomon is not saying don't make vows. He is emphasizing the integrity of the vow maker before the sovereign God of the universe who is not our buddy, not our pal, not simply our Sunday friend. This is not a god whose chief end of existence is YOU.

**Enter carefully.**  
**Listen closely.**  
**Speak clearly.**

And worship wisely, in humility and honor of the one who is LORD, not made Lord, the one who IS king, not made king, the one who IS savior, not made savior by our choices.

### **Ecclesiastes 5:7**

**<sup>7</sup> For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear. <sup>13</sup>**

Fear the Lord, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, right? That fear, that awe, that humble awareness that God is more pushes us down to our knees in worship. These commands to worship well lead us to partake of the Lord's Supper, not as a routine, but as an incredible gift from the God who gave his one and only Son so that we could live. We, the ones deserving death, with no way to earn a spot in heaven, were given a way, given a hope, provided a rescue through the perfect Son of God who is God the Son. Thus, it would be so very wrong to focus on how badly the grape juice may taste or how difficult it is to open these little containers, not to mention the texture of the little cracker. Forgive me for joking about it all at times. Enter carefully. Listen closely. Speak clearly. Let us worship together.

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<sup>13</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ec 5:7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.