

The Folly of Noisy Religion – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Main Idea: Reverent worship is not measured by outward activity or many words but by a humble heart that listens, obeys, and fears God.

I. The Heart of Worship | Ecclesiastes 5:1

As Solomon turns from examining life “under the sun” to examining life before God, he warns that vanity can even infect our worship. Having shown that pleasure, wealth, and toil are meaningless apart from God, Solomon now exposes the emptiness of careless religion. “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God,” he says, “for to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools.” This verse marks a shift in Ecclesiastes: **the Preacher now speaks directly to his hearers confronting not the pagan world but God’s own people.** This command is an invitation to thoughtful, heart-prepared worship.

The “house of God” originally referred to the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem—the visible dwelling of God’s presence among His people (1 Kings 8:10–13). There, priests offered sacrifices for sin, and Israel gathered to pray and rejoice before God. Yet through Christ, the true and better temple (John 2:19–21), God now dwells among His redeemed people by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16–17). **The “house of God” is no longer a building—it is the gathered people of God in whom His Spirit lives.** Wherever believers assemble, the holy presence of God is there. Therefore, Solomon’s call applies to every believer who gathers to worship in God’s presence today.

To “guard your steps” means to approach God thoughtfully, humbly, and with intentional preparation of heart. With spiritual alertness and self-examination. **The fool rushes into worship without reflection, treating holy things lightly; the wise prepare their hearts to meet the living God.** Solomon calls us to pause and consider who we are meeting with. The same God whose glory filled Solomon’s temple now dwells within and among His people. The writer of Hebrews captures this tension: “Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28–29). David models this posture in Psalm 27:4 — “One thing have I asked of the LORD... that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.” **The wise worshipper prepares both heart and mind.**

The Hebrew word for “fools” (*kesil*) conveys a spiritual and moral dullness—a heart that resists correction. Such a worshipper offers sacrifices outwardly but inwardly remains disobedient, as Saul did in 1 Samuel 15. This is why the prophet Samuel had to rebuke Saul by saying, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.” God delights not in ritual but in obedience born of faith. Jesus Himself rebuked outward religiosity that lacked heart devotion: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me” (Mark 7:6–7). **Thus, Solomon exhorts us: guard your steps; draw near to listen. Listening in Scripture always implies obedience** (Deuteronomy 6:4–5; James 1:22). True worship begins not with our words but with God’s Word—hearing, receiving, and responding. **When we come to church inattentive, hurried, or self-focused, we mirror those Solomon calls “fools”—offering God our presence without offering Him our hearts. Yet when we come humbly to listen, the Spirit of God meets us with grace, conviction, and renewal.**

To Ponder:

1. How does verse 1 challenge a casual approach to gathered worship?
2. What does it practically look like for you to “guard your steps” before worship?
3. In what ways do you find yourself drifting into offering “the sacrifice of fools”—going through religious motions without heart engagement?

II. The Way of Reverence | Ecclesiastes 5:2-7

Solomon now warns us about how we speak and respond before God. Reverence is not just about how we enter worship—it's about how we conduct ourselves while there. He continues, “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” (v.2). This verse centers us on divine transcendence. God is Creator; we are creature. He is holy; we are sinful. That reality should humble our speech. The fool believes that many words or lofty prayers impress God. **The distance between us and God is not geographical—it is theological.** Jesus warns us not to heap up many words, because God already knows what we need (Matthew 6:7-8). **The “many words” of the fool mirror an anxious attempt to control or manipulate God. Yet true reverence rests in His wisdom and sovereignty.** In a noisy world that prizes expression over reflection, silence before God becomes a forgotten act of worship. The posture of Mary at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:39) demonstrates that reverence listens before it speaks.

Verses 4–6 then warn about making vows or promises to God without follow-through. In the Old Testament, vows were voluntary acts of devotion—binding promises of worship or service to God (Deuteronomy 23:21–23). The “messenger” in verse 6 refers to a temple official who ensured fulfillment of such vows; some would excuse themselves by claiming, “It was a mistake.” Solomon calls this behavior evil and warns that God “takes no pleasure in fools.” **Worship without follow-through and promises without faithfulness is spiritual hypocrisy.** The Lord requires truth in the inward being (Psalm 51:6). To promise God change but continue in disobedience reveals a heart more concerned with appearances than holiness. Theologically, this exposes the danger of manipulative worship—using religion to bargain with God. **The gospel reminds us that grace is not earned by our words or vows but freely given through Christ's finished work. Our proper response is not to bargain but to trust, obey, and live faithfully before Him.**

Here Solomon brings his exhortation concerning worship to its conclusion. Empty religion—whether through careless speech, broken vows, or thoughtless ritual—is vanity. The antidote is the fear of God. To fear God is to live with trembling awe before His holiness and steadfast love (Psalm 111:10; 147:11). It is not servile terror but humble reverence that leads to wisdom, obedience, and joy. **Worship that lacks holy fear becomes casual and self-centered. Worship rooted in awe becomes joyful, obedient, and sincere.** The fear of the Lord silences our noisy religion and teaches us to stand amazed that such a holy God welcomes sinners through Christ. Solomon exposes that vanity does not stop at the temple gates. Without reverence, even worship becomes meaningless. The wise guard their steps, listen more than they speak, keep their word, and live in the fear of God. In Christ—the true temple and mediator—our noisy religion is replaced with humble adoration. Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 thus anticipates the gospel: **Jesus, the greater Solomon, makes true worship possible. His sacrifice reconciles us to the God we once offended so that we may draw near with confidence** (Hebrews 10:19–22). Reverence and relationship meet at the cross—where fear and love unite.

To Ponder:

1. How does a healthy fear of God challenge the casualness that sometimes characterizes modern Christianity?
2. In what kinds of situations do you usually bargain with God? How has that worked?
3. Are there areas of your life where God has become “too familiar,” where reverent worship has been replaced by routine? What practical steps can you take to grow in proper reverence?