

Eccl. 5:1-3 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

I liked the NLT translation for the first part of this section: *“As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut!”* Solomon seemed to understand well the importance of guarding one's tongue. If he is anything like me, it is a lesson learned through painful experience. He referenced this truth many times in his collection of Proverbs.

Proverbs 21:23 “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”

Proverbs 18:7 “A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

Proverbs 29:20 “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.”

He declares that the person who is quick to speak without first considering, or carefully thinking about what they want to convey, how they want to be perceived, and whether or not the setting and timing are appropriate often “do evil” in the process. The Hebrew for “evil” has a broad reach; it references causing adversity, distress, grief, hurt, misery, sorrow and trouble.

I know that the context as we continue in this chapter is specific to one's attitude toward entering the house of God as it applies to making vows to God, but the principle of thinking before speaking is just as important in all forums and situations involving communication with others.

The reference to “rash” speaking continues to emphasize speaking quickly without due consideration of your words. We are more likely to speak rashly when confronted with a situation that provokes our anger or hurts our feelings. Sometimes we are tempted to speak rashly in response to a desire to serve or meet a need without considering God's will in conjunction with other priorities and responsibilities we have (a more likely application to the context). When we choose to take on more than we can handle, we either end up stressed out and doing a poor job at trying to meet all our obligations or having to go back on our word and admit that we took on more than we could handle.

I like the CJB translation of verse 3: *“For nightmares come from worrying too much; and a fool, when he speaks, chatters too much.”*

As I continued to think about the application to one's demeanor upon entering the house of God, it made me think about the reason one would be going to the house of God. In Solomon's time it was a place to come and offer sacrifices for sin and/or gifts of praise and worship before Him. It was also considered a "house of prayer" as declared by the Lord Jesus as He quoted Isaiah.

Mark 11:17 "And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?"

Being "ready to hear" would seem to be a direct reference to hearing from God through the ministry of the Spirit as you listen to the reading of His word and in response to your time of prayer and worship. Aren't we much more prone to want God to hear what we have to say to Him than to take the time to hear what He has to say to us? To be able to hear Him we need to be willing to allow Him time to speak.

I think there is also reference to the motivation behind the words that accompany one's worship at God's house. I remember from previous studies how God despised the people coming before Him with rote words and empty ritual and with the pretense of sacrifice by bringing blind and lame animals.

Isaiah 1:11-13 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting."

Malachi 1:6-10 "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

God wants nothing less than our best freely given from a heart of love and gratitude as evidenced by the poor woman and her mites.

Luke 21:1-4 "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

I know I am wandering a bit, but in reading through the scripture again I recently ran across a section in Nehemiah that stood out to me regarding the right way to approach God in worship and with a desire to understand His word.

*Nehemiah 8:5-12 "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. **So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.** And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."*

Isn't that a beautiful picture of a people gathering in reverence with a desire to know God's word and responding with understanding in repentance for their shortcomings and in thankfulness and joy in the knowledge and understanding of God's word? Oh that this was a picture of the "church" today.

Eccl. 5:4-5 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

Let's refocus on Solomon's context regarding the importance of our words before God. A vow is a promise. Solomon is reiterating the words of Moses as he declares that God holds us accountable to our promises.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth."

I think it is important to note that reference is regarding that "which is gone out of thy lips...which thou hast promised with thy mouth." We can't always control the flow of our thoughts, but we can definitely control the words that we speak. When we make a conscious decision to voice a promise or commitment to God, He considers that binding. He is always faithful to His promise, and He expects the same from us.

I think this is an especially important truth for believers today to understand. We live in a culture in which a man's word is no longer valued, and it is easy for the believer to find himself conforming to the culture. Marriage vows are easily broken and dissolved. Truth is considered relative. The ends justifies the means is accepted practice. More than ever we need to stand out as different from the world and live our lives according to the irrefutable truth of God's word in submission and obedience to Him.

Eccl. 5:6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Eccl. 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are also divers vanities*: but fear thou God.

We saw from the verses in Deuteronomy quoted above that to make a vow to God and not keep it is a sin. "I didn't mean it" is not an acceptable excuse. The implication is that God might respond in anger to your unkept promise and destroy what you have achieved through your hard work. He would certainly be just in doing so.

I was about to give up on making the connection in context of verse 7 until I pulled out The Bible Knowledge Commentary, by Walvoord and Zuck. It gave the somewhat literal translation as "Through many dreams there is futility and also through many words." It made sense that Solomon was comparing rash vows to the many meaningless dreams that we have. Neither has value. Following after meaningless dreams can lead us astray (from the Hebrew for *vanities*) and rash vows can cause us to lose the fruits of our labor. The better choice is to live in fear and reverence before God in submission and obedience.

Eccl. 5:8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is higher than the highest regardeth*; and *there be higher than they*.

Solomon now makes another troubling observation. You shouldn't be surprised when you see the poor being unjustly treated and robbed of justice under the ruling authorities. You should remember that every ruler is subject to a higher authority, and the highest authority is God. They may think they are getting away with their actions, but God will intercede for His own.

Our problem with this truth is that God doesn't seem to act according to our expectations most of the time. We don't understand why the wicked seem to get away with their evil deeds and even seem to prosper in the process. We don't see the evidence of God's provision for the poor. Again, it is a matter of seeing through God's eyes. God is always acting so as to humble the sinner before Him in repentance and faith and to purify the believer through the trials He allows in his/her life to strengthen their faith and effectiveness in ministry.

Eccl. 5:9 ¶ Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field.

It's always interesting to read the different translations. The NIV and NLT seem to make a direct connection to the preceding verse as painting a picture of unfair taxation, and the king benefits the most from the labor of the poor who barely get by. The CJB considers this a statement regarding the benefit of having a king who uses his position to the benefit of his kingdom.

The truth is that society will always be a composite of people at different levels—the workforce at all levels (from the lowest level employee to the top level of employers) and those occupying the different levels of government that culminate in the highest recognized authority. Because man is sinful and the root sin is pride, there will always be those who abuse their position (at whatever level). When a people are blessed to have a ruler that fears God, they will benefit from his integrity and righteous judgments; when the ruling authority has no fear of God, the people will suffer according to his leadership as defined by his character.

Eccl. 5:10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

This verse is basically making the observation that man is never satisfied with the amount of money he has or the possessions he owns. Contrary to popular opinion—you can't buy satisfaction; you can't find fulfillment in riches. It's an empty, unsatisfying pursuit that will lead you astray from achieving true satisfaction and fulfillment. I am reminded of the words of Paul in his letter to Timothy.

1Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Eccl. 5:11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

This verse is an observation on the fact that the wealthier you are, the more "friends" and family will show up to help you spend it. I liked the phrasing of the CJB: *"When the quantity of goods increases, so does the number of parasites consuming them; so the only advantage to the owner is that he gets to watch them do it."*

It is sad but true that it is difficult for a wealthy man/woman to know who are their true friends. That truth becomes painfully clear, however, when adversity comes and you see who sticks around to help you and encourage you through the tough times.

Adam Clarke had a different perspective. He made the application that more holdings require more workers and more people to provide for as well as more

responsibility and stress associated with supervising your growing assets. His conclusion--Is it really worth it?

Eccl. 5:12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

Anyone who has put in a hard day's work knows the truth of the first part of this verse. The body is really ready for the time of rest, sometimes to the point of falling asleep before getting to eat.

In several of the translations the last part of the verse reads in reference to the full stomach of the rich person in contrast to that of the laborer. In other words, that he has so overstuffed himself that he can't sleep. This view seems to have the support of the Hebrew as I see it.

Some indicate that the many cares that are associated with the stress and responsibility of supervising his holdings are keeping him from sleep. I believe this is also a true statement.

Eccl. 5:13-15 There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and *there is nothing in his hand*. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

Solomon next takes note of the rich man who ends up losing his wealth through a poor business venture or theft or some other type of disaster. The result is that the man ends up with nothing to leave to his son, his heir. In the end, he will leave this life as naked and empty handed as he came into it.

Our culture is focused on getting material wealth to enjoy the temporal pleasures of this lifetime with no thought of gaining spiritual treasure that they will enjoy for eternity. The enemy has truly excelled in this area of deception. I am reminded again of the words of the Lord.

Matthew 6:19-21 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Eccl. 5:16-17 And this also is a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

As I continued to think on this section, I think it is emphasizing the last. A person will leave this life just as he/she entered it—with nothing. All the energy one invests in working to attain material wealth is pictured as futile, like

struggling with the wind. This knowledge causes many to live their lives in misery, sorrow and wrath. It's like living with an incurable disease.

Eccl. 5:18 ¶ Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.*

According to Solomon's observations, it is much better to enjoy what you have while you can. Don't worry about amassing more and more. Enjoy the life that God has given you; it's what God intended for you.

Eccl. 5:19-20 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; *this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.*

The wording indicates that Solomon recognizes that God is the source of all we have. In His sovereignty He chooses to give some riches and wealth and health to enjoy it all. That person should enjoy his work and rejoice in his blessings as a gift from God. One who takes that outlook will not look back on his life with sorrow, but with good memories of the blessings God has given him/her.

As a person who is not wealthy by American standards, I can find personal application to recognizing that this truth applies to one who is wealthy spiritually. I have found that the more I trust the Lord and live with the desire to honor Him, the more "wealthy" I consider myself to be in comparison to those who have only material wealth. He has filled my life with joy, especially through the blessings of my family. I know that He is going to supply what I need, so I don't sit around worrying about those needs. Though I know we may face much harder times ahead, I know that if I will continue to honor and obey the Lord, I have nothing to fear and everything to gain.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Philippians 4:19 "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

1 Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."