**Ecclesiastes**

**Chapter 5**

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**Ecc 5:1-3**

*Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. (2) 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. (3) For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.*

This text is similar to:

Deut 23:21-23 *"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. (22) "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. (23) "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.*

However the emphasis in the Ecclesiastes verses is on the limitations of human knowledge and how human existence is contingent upon the sovereignty of God. Guard your steps means to proceed with reference as God admonished Moses: Exo 3:5 *Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* Since he refers to a sacrifice, the house of God must mean Solomon’s temple built in the tenth century and destroyed in 587 B.C. rather than the synagogue. He warns readers to be careful how they approach God’s house as they should go to listen to Him rather than just offering a sacrifice as do fools who do not approach with reference and fear. The fools do not know what God requires so they do not even know when they are doing evil. This is also why we Christians need to know God so that we will not be doing evil when we are acting ignorantly. He is no telling us in verse 2 to not pray but he is telling us to remember that God is in heaven and we are on the earth meaning that He knows everything and we know very little. Therefore we should not hastily bring things before God nor should we be impulsive in thought concerning items we bring before His presence. Jesus forbade vain repetitions and much speaking in prayer:

Matt 6:7 *"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.*

The word “dream” in verse 3 refers not to literal dreams but refers to the fantasizing of performing great deeds. What God wants us to do depends upon His decrees and it requires a lot of effort for us to know what would please God. The fool will use many words to try to justify what he plans and to pretend as though he knows God’s ways whereas the man who wants to please God **acts** in His ways.

**Ecc 5:4-5**

*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! (5) It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.*

Not fulfilling a vow to God is very serious. We should simply state the truth: Mat 5:37 *"But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.* We should remember the punishment God sent on Ananias and Sapphira who made false vows (Acts 5:1-11). Whatever we vow to God we had better do. There is no reason to ever vow to do something when we have no intent to actually do it. It is certainly better to not vow something unless we are certain that it can be done. The parable of the two sons is informative in this regard:

Mat 21:28-30 *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' (29) "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. (30) "The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go.*

Rash vows can lead to much sorrow as found in the following:

Jdg 11:29-40 *Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. (30) Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, (31) then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (32) So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. (33) He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. (34) When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. (35) When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back." (36) So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon." (37) She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions." (38) Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. (39) At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, (40) that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.*

**Ecc 5:6-7**

*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. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? (7) For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.*

Limit your speech to what you really understand and discuss only those items that you know you can fulfill for if you do vow to do something that you know you cannot fulfill then you certainly will sin. The messenger of God could be an angel or it could be some priest whom God has informed that you have made a false vow. It does not excuse the false vow by just stating that you made a mistake in stating the vow. If you make a vow that is improper God will be angry and may bring about destruction of those items involved in the vow. These dreams are vain things and long statements of desires that will only bring emptiness. It is much preferable to fear God and desire only those things of which He approves and desires.

**Ecc 5:8-9**

*If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. (9) After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.*

Most interpreters see these verses as a statement about the corruption of government. The courts do not bring about justice for those poor people who cannot afford to influence the system and so this is just a result that one should expect to find. The court system is composed of many officials who oversee the functions of those officials under them and approve of the results. The king represents the entire government system and the overall effect is that the agricultural fields are cultivated and so is an advantage to the land. Another way to interpret verse 9 is that God rules over all systems and He will use even the impure lower systems to bring about His desire for the land. Thus we should trust the sovereign God and not get upset about the oppression of the poor and the sinful practices of the lower courts.

**Ecc 5:10-14**

*He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. (11) When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? (12) The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep. (13) There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. (14) When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him.*

We are told in other verses to avoid such a love of money:

* 1Tim 6:10 *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*
* Heb 13:5-6 *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," (6) so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"*

When the love of money dominates the thoughts and actions of a person he will surely never be satisfied for he will constantly want to have more. An investment that brings more profit will also never satisfy someone for it can easily be lost so a mind set constantly on money and the profits from its use will always be in a state of vanity. When a person’s estate increases in value the people using it will also increase in number. The owner must continually hire more laborers who will consume more of its value. Since the wealth is being spread around by those working in the estate the owner can only look at all his herds and say that they are his and he can go into his storage places and feed his eyes by looking upon bags of gold and other riches. If he just enjoys his wealth without using it to help others then he has made no profit for the world but only for himself. A working man who does not have the lust for more things will have a refreshing sleep whether he eats little or much. However the full stomach of the man devoted to his lust for more will not sleep pleasantly. He will always be thinking of ways to improve his status and the amount of his riches and will have no rest.

The Preacher has seen a horrible sickness in the world which is the hoarding of riches by the owner who does not share profits with the poor or otherwise help the world. Jesus said that it is a difficult thing for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven:

Mat 19:23-24 *And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

This person has devoted himself to his kingdom rather than to the kingdom of God and so will be rejected from an eternal admittance into God’s presence. The riches of the world can be easily lost by fire, thieves, misconduct in trade, and other means. Jesus again gives us wisdom:

Mat 6:19-21 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; (21) for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

This person had intended for his riches to be passed on to his son but when they waste away and come to nothing he will have nothing to give to his son. Or his son may waste the inheritance and so there is nothing left to support the father in his retirement or for his son.

**Ecc 5:15-17**

*As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. (16) This also is a grievous evil--exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? (17) Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.*

This statement may be taken to refer to the rich father, the son, or anyone for it is true that everyone leaves life with all his worldly accomplishments left behind. Only those treasures stored in heaven will be there for him (Matt 6:19-21). Job stated this well: Job 1:21 *He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."* This is a great argument against covetness. The Preacher uses death as the final negation of misplaced human values. It is indeed a grievous evil to think that toiling after the wind will bring about rewards that can be taken with him when he dies. Death is not an annihilation of man but being removed from one area of existence to another. For the person who is totally devoted to the world’s value system he will not be allowed into the kingdom of heaven but will live forever in the opposite arena. Even while living in the world he does not have some of the pleasures of a person devoted to serving God. He eats in darkness is metaphorical for isolation and joylessness. In the world he only finds worry, sickness, and anger. They come into the world without the image of God, without righteousness, without holiness, and without the grace of God and so they leave the world without these things. But the saints come into the world with sin but go out of it without sin as they have been washed in the blood of Jesus, justified by His righteousness an all of their sins are pardoned through the sacrifice of Jesus.

**Ecc 5:18-20**

*Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. (19) Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. (20) For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.*

He says that God has given a person a few years of life on earth and He rewards man by letting him eat and drink to moderation of all the results of his work. A person is not to deprive himself of those things of which he can lawfully partake and are necessary for him. Such is not just lawful but laudable. All should be done to the glory of God who gives such blessings to man. He continues that God has also blessed some people with riches and wealth and he has given them dominion ever them all so that he will not be a slave to them but can comfortable enjoy the fruits of his labors. This power is as much a gift of God as the things themselves. He will not consider his life as long and tedious nor dwell upon the troubles he has met but he will cheerfully and pleasantly enjoy the time given him by God. God provides his daily food and what He deems necessary and sufficient for his life. God then gives him the cheerfulness of spirit and thankfulness of heart to enjoy every blessing. He also grants him joy in the Holy Spirit so that he can forget all his former troubles and take away any concern for the future. All this is especially true for those whom God has chosen since before the foundation of the world to be His children:

* Eph 1:3-6 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (5) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*
* Rom 8:28-31 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (31) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*