

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Don't Play Church

Let me ask a personal question. How do you prepare for church on Sundays? Do you prepare for church? Do you take time to pray in order to prepare your heart? Or do you sleep late and then rush thru the morning? Do you argue with family members and then put on your "believer's face" when you get to the service? Do you come expecting to have your heart encouraged or challenged by the Word of God? Do you ask God to help you to be a blessing to others? How do you prepare to enter the assembly of the people of God?

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon has looked at life under the sun, without reference to or respect for God. And the scene has been pretty bleak. Now he paid a visit to the temple in Jerusalem where the worship of God took place. And what he saw wasn't much better.

There was religious pomp and ceremony. But it was often superficial. By their lack of heartfelt worship many people were robbing God of the honor and reverence He deserves. The worship of God is the highest activity that we do together as a church. And our worship must come from devoted hearts and consecrated wills.¹ Let's read what Solomon had to say.

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God;
and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice
of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.
(Ecclesiastes 5:1)

When you come to worship God guard your steps, that is be thoughtful about what you are doing. Don't join the family of believers thoughtlessly. Think about what you are doing and why you are doing it. Ask yourself, "Is my heart ready to hear the Word of God? Am I ready to take to heart what I hear in

¹ In John 4:24 Jesus said that we must worship God "in Spirit and truth." Some people teach that this means that true worship only occurs when we speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues is indeed worship—we give thanks well when we speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:17). But even speaking in tongues can be manifested from a cold, dull heart. The phrase "in Spirit and truth" means our worship must come truly from our innermost nature, our heart. In the context of John 4, the point is that no particular place is where worship occurs. And no physical act in and of itself like kneeling or standing, or singing or speaking is worship unless it comes truly from your spirit, that is your heart of hearts. See the reference to John 4:24 in [Word Studies on the Holy Spirit](#), E.W. Bullinger (Kregal Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985).

songs, prayers, manifestations of the Spirit and preaching?" The foundational creed of the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5 is this:

Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one!
⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Notice that the command to love God begins with the word "Hear." The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. And Jesus often proclaimed "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."² We don't want to offer the sacrifice of fools. In the context of Ecclesiastes the sacrifice of fools would be blathering, noisy worship without a humble, faith filled heart before God.

The sacrifice of fools is speaking pompous religious words to try and impress others and God. Instead, Romans 12 tells us that we should present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, with our lives yielded fully to Him, with our minds renewed by His Word, ready to prove His will in our daily lives.³ And Hebrews 13 encourages us to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; we are to do good and to share "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."⁴

When we come to worship and hear God's Word we need the conviction to welcome the Word that we hear "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which...works effectively in you who believe."⁵

Do not be rash with your mouth,
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
For God is in heaven, and you on earth;
Therefore let your words be few.
(Ecclesiastes 5:2)

When we pray in church or when someone preaches or speaks in any capacity, our remarks should not be rash. Our words should be thoughtful, encouraging, full of love and the fear of God. After all, God is in heaven and we are on earth. This is more than a space time reference. It reminds us that God is our Creator and we are fallen creatures saved by His grace, mercy and love.

If you and I were privileged to bring our needs and concerns and praise to the White House to speak to the President of the United States, we would

² Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; John 8:47; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22

³ Romans 12:1, 2

⁴ Hebrews 13:15, 16

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 2:13

prepare our words carefully and behave properly. How much more important this is when we gather together before the Almighty. Jesus taught

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

Therefore Jesus taught us to pray

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.
(Matthew 6:7-13)

Notice again the reference to God being in heaven and we on earth. And remember, Jesus also taught that our mouths speak forth what our hearts contain.⁶ Here is an analogy that reinforces this last point.

For a dream comes through much activity,
And a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words.
(Ecclesiastes 5:3)

When we are busy and our lives are full of concerns and tasks, we are likely to manifest that stress in our dreams. In the same way too many words can show the folly of our hearts. Fools tend to talk about more than they really know.

I read a blog on worship titled “Sing It Like You mean It.” But it had the word “Like” crossed out and the word “Because” written above it—“Sing It Because You Mean IT.” And as for our prayers, it is not the length of our prayers, but the strength of our prayers that makes a difference.

⁶ Matthew 12:34

Now, after telling us to listen up and to speak up only when we mean it, Solomon now tells us to pay up. Do what you promised God you would do.

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;
For *He* has no pleasure in fools.
Pay what you have vowed—
⁵ Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.
(Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5)

Talk is cheap and before God it is cheaper still if not backed up. In the Old Testament God never require people to make vows. But He did allow vows if someone felt led to make one. The same is true for the New Testament.⁷

Jesus scolded the religious leaders of his day for their vows. They made tricky distinctions on what vows were binding and what were not, depending upon what sacred object they based their promise. He said,

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;
³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.
(Matthew 5:33-37)

Therefore when you make a vow don't play games with God. When we marry we promise as husbands to love our wives like Christ loved the church—do we? We promise as wives to submit to our husbands as unto the Lord—do we? We dedicate our children, promised to fully bring them up in the admonition and training of the Lord—do we? We make promises as ordained leaders in the church to shepherd the flock of God, to serve willingly, not from compulsion or for dishonest gain—do we? We sing,

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.

⁷ Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Acts 18:18

Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee:
Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee;
Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.

Do we mean it when we sing this song?

Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say
before the messenger of God that it was an error.
Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy
the work of your hands?
(Ecclesiastes 5:6)

There are two ways we might sin with our vows. The first one is to make a promise and then to delay in doing what we promised. I think of the Christians in Corinth who promised to give an offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. But a whole year went by before they were exhorted by the apostle Paul to make good on that promise.⁸ The second way to sin is to make a vow with no intention of keeping it; in other words making a vow for show. I think of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 who vowed to give money from a possession they sold.⁹

Will God punish those who vow foolishly or with a lie? Yes, either here and now or by loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.¹⁰ Galatians 6:7 declares, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will receive."

God is gracious, patient and merciful. Rarely does He strike immediately with devastating judgment in response to a false vow. I am extremely grateful for that. But He can. Do you remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira?¹¹ Finally, Solomon states,

For in the multitude of dreams and many words
there is also vanity. But fear God.
(Ecclesiastes 5:7)

⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:10

⁹ Acts 5:1-12

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

¹¹ They both died before the church and the Spirit of God within the church to whom they lied.

The book of Ecclesiastes began by telling us that life under the sun, without God, is vanity. It is empty and short lived. Here we see that such vanity and emptiness can be seen in the day dreams and foolish words of those who play church.

The remedy is to fear God. But what does it mean to fear God? Does it mean to be afraid of Him? In one sense, yes, it does. Hebrews 12:28 and 29 tells us to serve God with reverence and godly fear, because our God is a consuming fire. Without Christ all of us stand guilty before the great judge of all. But in a more profound practical sense to fear God means so much more. Here are just a few verses that explain to us what it means to fear God.

Psalm 112:1 (119:63) to fear God means we delight in or find joy and pleasure in obeying God's will. And we will associate with other people who do as well.

Psalm 115:11 – to fear God means we trust Him completely.

Psalm 130:4 – to fear God means you understand that God who could convict us forgives us our sins.

Psalm 147:11 – to fear God means we hope in His mercy or steadfast, loyal love.

And finally,

Proverbs 8:13 – to fear God means we hate what is evil.

When we fear God and love Him we then will begin to worship Him not only in the beauty of holiness,¹² but we will listen with expectancy, we will be thoughtful about what we say and we will be determined to do what we have promised.

¹² Psalm 29:2; Psalm 96:9

