

## Reverence and Awe Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

If you're new, we're studying the book of Ecclesiastes, a wisdom book that considers various **matters of life under the sun - life in a fallen and frustrated world.**

- We have considered the brevity of life, death, the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of pleasure, our toil, wealth, friendship, and more.
- Now we look at what Zack Eswine calls “**Church Under the Sun**” in Ecclesiastes 5.
- **Ecclesiastes is kind of like flipping through your pictures – looking at pictures of our friends, your food, your toil, our house, our study, and now we come to pictures of a Sunday gathering in worship.**
- **A dominate theme here is the need to be quiet before God – to listen to him. [Pray]**

Run DMC had a song that came to mind when I read this text: “You Talk Too Much.”

*You talk too much  
You never shut up  
I said you talk too much  
Homeboy you never shut up*

*Hey! You over there, I know about your kind  
You're like the Independent Network News on Channel 9  
Everywhere that you go, no matter where you at  
I said you talk about this, and you talk about that  
When the cat took your tongue, I say you took it right back  
Your mouth is so big, one bite would kill a Big Mac*

*You talk too much  
You never shut up  
I said you talk too much  
Homeboy you never shut up*

**The Preacher [Qoheleth in Hebrew, 1:1] has a similar idea when it comes to worship.**

“God is in heaven; you are on earth, let your words be few... Do not let your mouth lead you into sin.”

- **His word is like James 1:19, that we should be “quick to listen and slow to speak.”**

**Have you ever been in the presence of someone you admire greatly?**

**Do you just start *yapping* away? Don't you have a deep sense of focus and reverence?**

**Two weeks ago, I had the privilege of having brunch with John Piper – a well known pastor and author... a man I deeply admire.**

- **So this was no ordinary Monday. I was having scrambled eggs with Piper!**
- **So I first asked him some family questions, and then about his upcoming sermon... and I had many other questions I wanted to ask him.**
- **But then he starts asking me questions!**
- **He asked, “What are you writing?” I told him “sermons on Ecclesiastes.”**
- **I said “I noticed you don't have any on your website from Ecclesiastes” ... I said “It's the only book not in the Scripture index.”**

- He said, “No I don’t have Song of Solomon either.”
- I said, “We’re doing that next!”
- Piper said, “Please teach me Ecclesiastes!” And he begins asking me questions...
- I was like, “This is not how this is supposed to work. You are supposed to be the one talking!”
- It was like this when we were with Tim Keller a few years ago. He talked for like 25 minutes and then sat down they gave us a group exercise, while he is just sitting at the table! I was like, I don’t want a group exercise! If Tim Keller is in the room, he should be talking and we should be taking notes!

When you are in the presence of someone like that, you pay attention, you defer, you honor...

Run DMC should not have to sing their song to you!

**How much more in the presence of Almighty God?**

We should not flippantly enter worship, but should rather approach him with reverence and awe, and be ready to listen to his word and be changed.

Ecclesiastes is written some 3,000 years ago and not much has changed.

**This text addresses a number of different groups of people.**

- Many don’t think about God all week, and then roll in for an hour, throw up a few words, not really engage, and then get back on with life – thinking it’s all good.
- Others, think they know everything and they’re not changed by the Word.
- Consumer Christians bounce from church to church when things aren’t exactly the way they want it.
- Some churches give people nothing to listen to – there’s very little about God’s Word.
- Many think that prayers prayed in Old English that contain a lot of “bessech thees” are impressive to God.
- We all need a good dose of Ecclesiastes 5 – God is in heaven and we are on earth, so let your words be few.

So let’s start with the obvious. **God is the most important word in the passage.**

- I count 6 times in 7 verses.
- So who do we worship? We worship the **God** that we’ve been reading about in Ecclesiastes – the **God who is good, eternal, wise, just, and holy.**

How are we to approach God?

- Notice the **bookends**, “guard your steps” (v. 1) and “God is the one you must fear.” (v. 7)
- We approach God in worship with **reverence and awe.**
- The world is filled with religious worshipers. But what kind of worshipers are we to be?
- **The Preacher tells us quite simply to worship the true and living God with reverence and awe, not with endless words, empty promises, and mindless rituals.**

Of course, this is not the only attitude appropriate for worship.

- The **Psalms** are filled with verses about **entering with thanksgiving and joy!** We are commanded to celebrate w/ loud instruments, to lift our hands/clap/shout...
- Further, those living on this side of the cross, **know the truth of the resurrection which should lead us to be people of great joy!**

**But this text is focusing on reverence and awe for two reasons:**

**(1) It is appropriate when worshiping God – Hebrews 12:28-29**

<sup>28</sup> Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our God is a consuming fire.

The “**fear of God**” is not just an Old Testament concept!

- “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb 10:31)
- “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28)

**(2) Because the writer is addressing a problem with religious worshipers who talk to much, who flippantly approach God with empty sacrifices and empty promises.**

- When you lose your awe of God, you are a walking disaster zone.

**Worship is to be filled with **gravity and gladness**; and the text here is pointing us to the *gravity* of worship. Realize who it is you are worshiping!**

## **Context**

Now you may think this is an **abrupt shift from chapter 4**, or the rest of the book for that matter, but **I don’t think it is.**

- One could argue that worship has been a major focus thus far – **only it has addressed the false gods that people worship – pleasure, knowledge, wealth, power, achievement.**
- **Jesus said you cannot serve two masters.**
- **You can worship false gods of wealth, self-advancement, power and status, or you can worship the true and living God.**
- **And it’s not until you get the worship question right, that you really get life and death right.**

## **Structure**

Various scholars have pointed out a clear structure to this short passage (ie Duane Garrett). There are two segments that include (1) an exhortation stated **positively**, (2) an exhortation stated **negatively**, and (3) a **proverb**. “God is the one you must fear” is the **conclusion**.

A: Positive: Approach God with humility and attentiveness; avoid the “sacrifice of fools” (v. 1).

B: Negative: Do not be quick to speak before God, for he is awesome (v. 2).

C: Proverb: Fools gush out many empty words (v. 3).

A’: Positive: Keep your vows (v. 4).

B’: Negative: Make no vow that you are not certain to keep (vv. 5–6).

C’: Proverb: Fools gush out many empty words (v. 7a).

Conclusion: Fear God (v. 7b)

**A. Approach God with humility and attentiveness; avoid the sacrifice of fools (5:1)**

“Guard your steps” – proceed with caution.

- This is a reminiscent of **Exodus 3** where Moses encounters God through the burning bush.

“The house of God” – here in Ecclesiastes refers to **Solomon’s temple**.

- This was the center of everything for the Jew.
- It was massive in **size and grander and was intended to draw people’s attention to the greatness of God**.
- **But of course, worship could be turned into a sham if you forgot about God and just started going through the motions of offering your sacrifices.**

Now, we don’t have a temple to make a pilgrimage to – we have access to God through **Jesus Christ, the one greater than the Temple**.

- We have constant access to God by grace.

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...

<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- Through Jesus [not a temple] we have access to God in worship.
- Now we are his temple. He dwells in us.

So while **buildings are not unimportant**, they are **not most important** when it comes to worship.

- **What makes our building special is the fact that you are here!**
- **If God’s people are not gathered here together, then I wouldn’t come to this building!**
- **But when the saints are here, it’s special.**
- **We just got in our new house – and on Monday Kimberly was there reading her Bible waiting on a plumber to do some work... and the house was empty. She said, “An empty house is slightly creepy when alone in it.”**
- **What makes a house a home is the family that resides in it.**
- **What makes a church building special, is the family of God who assembles in it.**
- **It may be a grand building with high ceilings or a store front, in a house in China, or under a shelter in an impoverished area – what makes it special is God’s people.**
- And when the saints gather, we are to worship with **gladness** – yes, for Christ has made a way for us to enter the holy place – but also with **gravity**.

“Draw Near to Listen”

- **That means you show up and listen up.**

“... not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Heb 10:25)

- The Day is drawing near! What should you do? **Assemble with God’s people!**
- And listen to his word.

“To draw near to listen” – this assumes God’s Word is being expounded.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of listening for spiritual growth:

- **Garden:** “Did God really say?” They listened to the wrong voice.
- **Israel,** “Stiff necked people” who refuse to listen/obey. A history of not listening to the prophets. Psalm 81:13: “Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!”
- **Nehemiah 8** – great scene, of everyone being attentive to God’s Word.
- **Jesus’ Parable of the sower** is all about hearing, “be careful how you hear...”
- “My sheep listen to my voice.”
- **When explaining the process of restoration, at the heart is listening rightly:** Matthew 18:15–17: 15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.
- **Transfiguration:** “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!”
- **Mary/Martha:** Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet listening to his word” (Luke 10). She chose what was better.
- **Repeatedly,** “If anyone has ears to hear...”
- **7 Churches,** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”
- That’s just a small sampling.
- Listening is crucial, because it leads to understanding and then to change.
- Do you believe this is His word? Or would you rather be somewhere else?
- Do you try to multi-task — surfing the web/on social media during the exposition?
- Let us be like Samuel, “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”
- Draw near to listen.

Sometimes we speak negatively about the “**routine**” of Sunday worship, but not all routines are bad!

- As I have told my kids, reading your Bible every morning for 30 minutes is not just about what you get out of it, but it’s about the habit that will form you.
- Not every morning will be a great spiritual high... but you are building patterns, a liturgy that can shape you.
- Our practices and habits form us.
- The same with corporate worship.
- We know this to be true in other aspects of life...
  - A basketball player gets better at his/her jump shot by the routine – by practice.
  - An artist or craftsman gets better at the craft by repetition.
  - I say this about preaching all the time – you need reps.
- And sometimes in practice you fail ... but the runner doesn’t quit when he doesn’t reach his goal, he presses on with more reps...

- It is like that with worship; you don't quit when you don't get some wild buzz about the service.
- Eswine, "The House of God isn't meant for one-time experiences or for an "every-time-a-spectacular-time-or-we-quit kind of approach."
- **No, you keep attending, assembling, listening, worshipping... and allow the impact of consistently hearing God's word and worshipping with God's people form your loves.**

So the Preacher isn't asking us to do something we don't ordinarily do – schedule things and do the same things... **he is asking is to attend with care and preparation.**

- **What is negative about the routine is not the routine; it's when you do it mindlessly and foolishly.**
- **So let me encourage you to get prepared for corporate worship.**
- **Get to bed at a decent hour; get up and read and pray...**
- **Come ready to encourage someone, to pray with someone, to listen to the Word...**
- **Don't stay up all night, wake up late, show up late, and just sort of halfway listen and go through the motions.**

**"The Sacrifice of Fools, they do not know that they are doing evil"**

- Instead of offering a **sacrifice of praise**, as we should, some offer **sacrifices of fools**.
- He is talking about a **lack of sincerity in the offering of these sacrifices at the temple**.
- **"Evil."** Heartless sacrifices are not only foolish, **they're evil**.

A lot of people have a hard time with the church today.

- When we read Ecclesiastes you should see that there is good reason.
- **There's a lot of foolery done in the name of God.**
- There's a **lot of evil done** in the name of God.
- This fact is being addressed right here.
- We see it right after the church is born in **Acts 5** – with Ananias and Sapphira **who lied to God about how much that put in the offering plate.**
- We see it in **1 Corinthians** as people were abusing the Lord's Supper.
- **If that's you, if you feel skittish about the church, then you should know this happens, but you should also see that the application is not to run away from the church, but to pursue authentic worship.**
- You don't read in Acts 6, people saying, **"Well you know the church is filled with people like Ananias and Sapphira, so I'm giving up on the church."**
- No, they keep assembling, hearing the Word, worshipping, and the church marched on in power!
- **Jesus taught us that there would be wheat and weeds** growing in God's field.
- **There are sheep and goats** gathered under the same roof every Sunday – and **one day the Lord will sort it all out.**
- The **goal is to worship rightly – with reverence and awe; to be one of Christ's sheep, who love the Good Shepherd and listen to his voice.**

## B. Do not be quick to speak before God, for he is awesome (5:2)

“Be not rash with your mouth... utter a word before God...”

- Every word is said before God, and we will be held accountable for every word spoken (Matt 12:36 — a sobering thought for a preacher!).
- He need to remember this on social media, which is like reading a bathroom wall.
- We live in a day in which you can criticize and attack anyone without any accountability.
- But you will be held accountable eventually by the One who matters most.
- So be careful making judgments and accusations, especially when you don't have all the information...
  - There are at least 90 Proverbs on the right use of our words...
- While every word matters, Qohleth may have *prayer* in mind specifically.
  - Don't just say a lot of pious sounding words in prayer like the Pharisees who wanted to be esteemed as spiritually elite (Matt 6.5ff)...
- “Do not let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God.”
  - Begg says God is not listening to us with a earplugs, as we are talking to him with a microphone but rather, God is listening to us with a stethoscope.
- He knows our hearts!

Why should we be slow to speak? “God is in heaven and you are on earth.”

- This doesn't mean that God is not active on earth – he is. It's a statement about his transcendence; about his greatness.
- The Lord's Prayer gives us the balance we need, “Our Father [he's good, loving, approachable] “in heaven” [he's majestic, transcendent, holy].
- Qoheleth is saying remember how big God is and how small you are, and be quick to listen and slow to speak.

## C: Fools gush out many empty words (5:3).

- instead of listening to God's word, fools talk too much, they never shut up.
- “A dream comes with much business” (that is through overwork, toil)
- It is natural for a fool to have many words just as it is for a workaholic to have endless dreams about pointless gain.

## Our words must matter in song, prayer, preaching.

- Charles Bridges, “The fewness of the words is not the main concern; but whether they be the words of the heart.”
- This is the way of wisdom in worship.

Jesus is the model for this and gives us the power of doing this.

- Model: He never uttered a false word.
  - He never sinned with his words.
  - On the cross, his words were chosen carefully.

- **Power: He died for those who sin regularly with their words; and by his grace he gives us the grace to worship God with reverence and awe...**
- **In Solomon's day sacrifices were offered because of sin – when it was dedicated, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were offered to God!**
  - But we have access now **through the spotless lamb that was slain.**
  - Apart from Christ, we cannot enter; but through Christ **we have access.**
  - May we never get over this fact, and may we forever stand in awe of our Christ.
  - The temple was a reminder of the **garden of Eden** – with all the symbols and structures.
  - Eden was a place to stand in awe of God.
  - One day Paradise will be restored and we will see Christ, and we will stand in awe with all the redeemed.
- Let us worship our God with reverence and awe while we live under the sun.

### **Worship with Reverence and Awe, Segment #2 (5:4-6)**

**We see this same focus on approaching god with reverence and awe but now with regard to making vows.**

#### **A. Keep your vows (5:4)**

- A vow was a promise to God. Today, we think of marriage, vows made to the church, or other promises you make to God.
- We think of commitments we make to each other.
- In the Bible, a vow could be part of a **prayer for God's blessing**. “When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive. <sup>2</sup> And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.” <sup>3</sup> And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah” (Numbers 21:1-3)
- It could also **be a spontaneous expression of gratitude** (Jon. 2:9). “But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!”
- **It also appears when Hannah promises to dedicate her son to God's service if God would indeed bless her with a son. (1 Sam 1:11)**
- Proverbs teaches us that we should be **slow** in making promises to God (Prov 20:25)
- Here in Eccl, the Preacher warns against **delay** (cf. Deut. 23:21–23):
- God is worthy of our obedience! “Praise is due you, oh God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.” (Ps 65:1)
- **Pay what you vow! Keep commitments.**
- **To do otherwise is the mark of a fool.**

#### **B. Make no vow that you are not certain to keep (5:5–6)**

**5: When you tell God you're going to do something, do it.**

- **Say what you mean and mean what you say.**



- Jesus taught us “Let your **yes be yes** and your **no be no.**”

**6: Warning: God does not take vows lightly and broken promises angers him.**

- “**Get me out of this situation and I’ll be a missionary in Africa**” – don’t do that.
- Don’t do the crisis-promise thing.
- “**Lord if John will ask me out, I’ll tithe 30 percent.**”
- “**If that guy will ask me out, then I will read Leviticus 7 times a day ... backwards.**”
- **No, we’re not cutting a deal with God!**
- **Those kinds of things are foolish; when the crisis passes, you forget about it because you didn’t really mean it.**

**Akin gives a contemporary example:** “I met with a man years ago who was experiencing a crisis of faith. He was 40 years old and single, and he was thinking of walking away from the church. He said he had been raised in church, had gotten away from it in early adulthood, and then came back at 35 because he desperately wanted to be married. He told me that for five years he attended worship, tithed regularly, and volunteered in ministries, and yet God had not given him a wife. Akin says, ‘He did not want God. He wanted what God could give him.’”

- **God help us.**

So again in this paragraph, the focus is on our words and on pious rituals that have no substance.

- Don’t let your *mouth* may lead you into sin. **Practice restraint.**

**“Do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake...”**

- “messenger” is likely a minister/priest serving in the temple...
- Don’t say to him, “**I didn’t really mean it**”
- That will anger God all the more!
- It will arouse God’s displeasure and he will act in judgment eventually.
- **Derek Kidner summarizes this text speaks to “the well-meaning person who likes a good sing and turns up cheerfully enough to church; but who listens with half an ear, and never quite gets round to what he has volunteered to do for God.”**

**C. Fools gush out many empty words (5:7a)**

- **He repeats this saying again. So get the point.**
- **God takes no pleasure in foolish chatter.**
- **Luke 18**, short prayer but from the heart, “God be merciful to me a sinner” - that man, who prayed a heart felt prayer, was justified.

**Again, Jesus gives us the model and the power.**

- **He is the only one who kept every promise to the Father.**
- **Through him we can be people who follow through on our promises.**

**Conclusion: Fear God (5:7b)**

Take God seriously.

Revere him, stand in awe of him.

Stand in awe of his holiness; stand in awe of us mercy.

- 6 For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?  
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,  
7 a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,  
and awesome above all who are around him? (Ps 89:6-7)

Mark 4; Luke 5... who is this? Depart from me Lord...

So what do you do if you feel as though you have not worshiped rightly?

Good news: Christ continues to forgive, renew, cleanse, and change us, and that makes us stand in awe of him.

**Jesus forgives sinful people on earth and makes a stand in awe of the God of Heaven. You know, this is one of the keys to fearing God: treasuring his forgiveness. You see this connection in a number of places in the Psalms.**

**Psalm 130:3-4**

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who could stand?  
But with you there is forgiveness,  
that you may be feared.*

- **Psalm 130.4** – “with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”
- That sounds strange; shouldn't it say, “that you may now do whatever you want”?
- **No. That's not how it works!**
- **The forgiveness of Jesus leads to awe before God.**
- **How Great thou Art speaks of forgiveness... And it makes us bow down in reverence at his grace.**

*And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on a Cross, my burdens gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

**Grace at times makes us dance with joy;  
and grace at other times, leaves us speechless awe.**

- **When I consider what a wretch I am, and how corrupt my heart is, and the fact that I have no business being in God's presence, but Jesus Christ has cleansed me; he who was the ultimate sacrifice has made me new and forgiven and acceptable in God's sight, that just leaves me speechless.**
- This doesn't lead me to be cavalier or mindless, it makes me stand in awe!
- It makes me want to obey my God.

- It put me on my face in God's presence, and in humility I say, "Who am I that you are mindful of me?"

With Jesus there is forgiveness, that he may be feared.

That forgiveness is experienced through *real repentance not empty rituals.*

That is one of the benefits of the table, it is a time to repent, confess, and experience forgiveness and renewal which leads to reverence before God.