

Message #15

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

J. Vernon McGee one time said something that was very true and very startling: “Religion has damned more people than anything else...” Most people who will go to hell will be people who went to church.

In the context of Ecclesiastes, the sense of these verses is that some people will try to find meaning and fulfillment in a life of religion. They will go to church looking for answers and looking for meaning. But very few will actually find what they are looking for because they go with the wrong spirit and they go with the wrong motives.

Truth is very few people go to church because they actually want to know God and His Word. In fact, Paul predicted as we near the end that the time will come when most people going to church will not endure sound doctrine but will go hear some minister who will scratch their religious itch in an inoffensive way (II Tim. 4:3).

Solomon, himself, had been in many temples looking for meaning and fulfillment. In fact, he actually built temples for his foreign wives so they could have their own form of worship (I Kings 11:1-8).

IN ORDER FOR WORSHIP TO BE A MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE, IT MUST BE ENTERED INTO IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH GOD’S STANDARDS FOR WORSHIP.

It is possible for people to go to church and never find meaning and fulfillment. It is also possible for people to come to church and be blessed of God and find great meaning and fulfillment.

PRINCIPLE #1 – Meaningful worship must guard one’s steps. **5:1a**

What I understand this to mean is that when a person is preparing to go to the House of God to worship God, he must take a serious look at his life and carefully guard what he is doing or saying before he goes to the House of God.

Now the House of God in Solomon’s day would have been the temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 3:1; II Chron. 8:16). The Hebrew word “guard” is one that means to observe, to attend to, to watch, to keep safe (Gesenius, p. 837). What Solomon is saying is if worship is to be meaningful, before one goes to the House of God, he must take careful care of his personal and private life. He must carefully guard what he is doing, where he is going and, as we shall see, what he is saying.

As Dr. Leupold said some people just get in a habit of going to church but they aren’t in the habit of guarding their own spiritual life and, as a result, church is nothing more than some ritualistic experience (Leupold, p. 119).

PRINCIPLE #2 – Meaningful worship goes to hear. **5:1b**

God wants His people to come to church to expectantly hear the Word of God. In fact, He would rather have His people going to church this way than going to offer the sacrifice of fools.

As one commentator said, "...it is more acceptable to God that one should go to his house to hear the Law read and taught and expounded, than to offer a formal sacrifice..." (*Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 9, p. 111).

PRINCIPLE #3 – Meaningful worship is quiet worship. **5:2-3**

Meaningful worship is meditative.

Now **verse 3** gives the reason why God wants His people quiet; because He speaks to people who are quiet and not to people who are emotional and irrational fools.

Back in Solomon's day, God spoke to people through dreams and visions. In our day, God speaks to people through His written Word. Listening to God's written Word expounded is an intense effort. The Word of God speaks to the people of God as they quietly and intensely listen. The fool who is always shooting off his mouth will not hear God's Word whatsoever. His religious experience will be an effort in futility because God does not speak to fools.

PRINCIPLE #4 – Meaningful worship is word-keeping worship. **5:4-5**

There are all kinds of people who go to church and promise all kinds of things and then as soon as something happens, they go back on their word and then wonder why God isn't doing something dynamic or dramatic with them.

God does not think highly of people who go to His church and promise to do one thing and then do something else. God takes no delight in fools who make some promise before God and don't follow through on it. It is better to not promise to do anything than to make some promise before God and not follow through on it.

Michael Eaton, in his commentary, writes: "The vow in ancient Israel was a promise to God, which might be part of prayer for blessing (Numbers 21:2) or a spontaneous expression of gratitude (John 2:9). It might take the form of a promise of allegiance (Genesis 28:20-22), a freewill offering (Leviticus 22:18) or the dedication of a child as Nazarite (I Samuel 1:11). As in the matter of prayer, haste in taking a vow is cautioned against elsewhere (Proverbs 20:25). Here the Preacher warns against delay (cf. Deuteronomy 23:21-23) and evasion: Pay what you vow! Failure in these respects is a mark of fools" (Eaton, p. 99).

Dr. Chuck Swindoll said of these verses: “These are some of the most overlooked words in all of Scripture—and especially so in a day of shallow roots and superficial commitments. We’d much rather bail out than follow through. As a result, a promise is little more than a casual hope. Whether it’s a commitment to pay back fifty dollars or a commitment to stay faithful in marriage, the idea of sticking with a vow regardless is almost unheard of.” Not so in God’s eyes! Again, His truth penetrates. He says, “You vowed it...you keep it” (Swindoll, p. 153).

PRINCIPLE #5 – Meaningful worship is controlled speech worship. **5:6-7**

There are things said in the church that are sin before God.

Apparently, according to **verse 7**, there were people coming to the services saying they really knew the will of God. They were claiming God had revealed things to them and they uttered forth their ignorance. Even though such people think they are really doing right before God, God is angered by such a person and eventually He will destroy the work of such a person.

People who go to church to worship God ought to pay close attention to what they say in the House of God, for God pays close attention.

Practical lessons for meaningful worship:

1. Guard yourself before you go to the House of God.
2. Prepare yourself before you go to the House of God.
3. Go to church wanting to hear the Word of God.
4. Be very slow to promise anything before God.
5. Follow through on what you promise to do.
6. Guard your speech.