

ECCLESIASTES 5

WORSHIP GOD WITH REVERENCE!

It is part of the teaching of this Book that the highest good possible to man, amidst the limitations and fluctuations of the present life, can only be attained in connection with that reverence of the Most High which lies at the root of all true religion. The Preacher did not include genuine religion among the “all things” which he regarded as “vanity.” Rather, he viewed such religion as something that did indeed redeem human life from its unsatisfactoriness. But at the same time, he saw that many of his countrymen were turning religion itself into a vain thing by making it a mere matter of formalities and words. Even in his day, there seemed to have been that spirit of formalism which ultimately developed into the Pharisaism of our Lord’s time; and this formalism seems to have been associated with a general thoughtlessness and irreverence that was entirely incompatible with true religion. The exhortation to “keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” refers to that reverent demeanor and spirit which ought to characterize those who are about to worship the Lord.

But the same irreverence which was leading thoughtless people in Solomon’s day to offer the required sacrifices in mere mechanical routine was also leading them to pour out a multitude of prayers without meditation or earnestness. The great distance between the Creator and His creatures demands humility, awe, and thoughtfulness in worship; and therefore, the mere gabbling of words in prayer is an insult to the Majesty of Heaven. As a general rule, a vociferous speaker is not the most accurate or earnest thinker. The wise man who thinks and feels deeply is more likely to utter himself in fewer words – but words that are better ordered and more sincere!

The Preacher passes naturally from prayers to vows. The same irreverence which leads a person to go up lightly to the house of God, and which leads him to pour out a great many words of prayer without much thought or feeling, leads him also to make vows without proper consideration – and then, with careless profanity, to back out of these very vows which he has made. Such a practice strikes at the very root of religion by making light of God Himself. All lawful promises, even to our fellow-men, ought to be regarded as sacred; but a lawful promise made to the Lord ought to be regarded as particularly binding, so it should not be made hastily.

A reverent recognition of the Most High also brings a certain consolation amidst the injustice and tyranny of wicked people. The Preacher has already recorded how the sufferings and tears of the oppressed had nearly plunged his own soul into despair. Here he seems to be exhorting his readers not to let themselves be overwhelmed by the spectacle of such oppression, but to lift up their eyes to

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ An exhortation to come into the Lord’s presence with reverence – verses 1-9
- ❖ A series of truths which teach us of the vanity of worldly wealth – verses 10-20

that Supreme and Mighty One Who is above all human government leaders. This thought had doubtless delivered Solomon's own soul from dismay, as he remembered that none of these things could happen without Divine knowledge and permission, and that God would ultimately judge between the righteous and the wicked.



The chief lesson in this chapter is the grand lesson of reverence toward Jehovah. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom!" "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." Without heartfelt reverence for the name and the will of God, worship degenerates into mere formalism; and formalism will eventually develop into hypocrisy, and even into profanity. We know how Jesus denounced the formalism of the Pharisees. We know how He warned His disciples against the heathen notion that their prayers were more likely to be heard because they were full of many words; for our Father knows the things that we need, before we even ask Him. We remember Christ's picture of the tax collector going to the Temple and simply saying, with deep reverence and penitence, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" The exhortations of Ecclesiastes have thus been confirmed by Jesus Himself. If our worship of God is the true, devout, and trustful communion of our innermost soul with our Maker and Father in heaven, then we shall find that it gives us real and satisfying blessedness!

The grand theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes is the vanity of this world as man's portion, if there is nothing beyond the grave. Solomon had previously shown the vanity of great possessions when they belong to monarchs; but someone might say that if a man was not perplexed with the cares of government, the verdict would be entirely different. Therefore, in the latter portion of this chapter, the wise man takes up the subject of wealth in general. He presents us with a series of weighty and impressive truths which prove that great riches cannot make people genuinely happy. And at the end of one's time on this earth, those riches cannot be taken with them into the next world. How foolish it is, then, to spend our whole lifetime raking together heaps of worldly treasures that must be left behind, instead of making sure of our incorruptible inheritance of true treasures in heaven!

If worldly wealth was all that man was made for, then it might well be asked of God, "Wherefore hast thou made man in vain?" It is in this way that the Preacher comes to the conclusion that there *must* be another life! Riches in themselves are not evil; but when they are viewed as the great purpose of life, they must be ranked as the vanity of vanities.

Lord, we confess that we have often come into Your presence with a thoughtless attitude. We pray for grace to reverently worship You in spirit and in truth! Amen.