

Ecclesiastes 5 (ESV)

5:1 - Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.

- A. "Guard your steps" = "proceed with care" or "proceed with reverence"
- B. "House of God" is the temple, not a synagogue or teaching center
- C. "Listen" is better than taking vows (5:2, 4, 5)
- D. Read Deuteronomy 23:21-23
 - 1. "If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth."

5:2 - Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

- A. Point here is (as it is throughout Ecclesiastes) man does not know. It is better to be quiet than to make vows and promises concerning what you are going to do.
- B. When standing before God it is better to let him speak than for a man to speak.
- C. The foolish, irreverent man acts presumptuously before God by speaking:
 - a. Promises
 - b. Vows
 - c. Bargaining
 - d. Boasting
 - e. Promoting
- D. Qoheleth does not speak against prayer or praying to God, but he does warn men not to talk to God like they:
 - a. Know anything
 - b. Have anything
 - c. Can do anything
- E. Likewise, Qoheleth is not against vows themselves, but knows the severity of failing a vow.

5:3 - For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

- A. Here is a theme that is repeated again in 5:7: Dreams
- B. Most important is the meaning of the term "dream". This is not talking about night dreams or night visions, but DAYDREAMS, fantasies, wishful thinking or a man's talk about what he is going to do in the future.
- C. In 5:3 daydreaming is the result of "much business" or "many cares" or, basically, the reality of life.
- D. The fool faces the harsh reality of life with wishful thinking and speaks many words about his daydreams.
- E. The wise man faces reality, shuts his mouth and gets the job done instead of wishing, talking and dreaming about the way life could be.

5:4 - When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.

- A. A vow should be made soberly while facing reality, because God is going to plan on you fulfilling your commitment.

- B. Here is a good place to point out that emotional commitments made while the music plays in the background and the preacher utters empty promises and names meaningless examples of success are exactly what Qoheleth is warning against here.

5:5 - It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

- A. It is better to walk out of the emotional, self-help service than to stay for the commitment.
- B. No commitment is better than a mis-based commitment.

5:6 - Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

- A. The “messenger” could be:
 - a. God
 - b. An angel
 - c. Servant of God (priest, prophet)
 - d. Messenger from the temple come to collect the vow
- B. Note, the destruction that comes from an angry God when the “messenger” comes to collect the unpaid vow.

5:7 - For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

- A. Don't honor yourself by taking impressive vows or trying to accomplish great things for God
- B. Instead, be fearful of God and honor him by keeping your mouth shut.
- C. God knows. You do not.
- D. The problem comes when a man does not understand the greatness of God, but yet has the ability to keep talking about himself and making promises with his mouth.

NEW TOPIC: The benefit of Government, even a flawed government in a fallen world.

5:8 - If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

- A. The corruption of any human government is clearly admitted and identified.
- B. Qoheleth warns the reader to anticipate government corruption, instead of being surprised by it.
- C. Qoheleth explains why there is always some level of corruption in any human government (actually, any human institution):
 - a. Everyone in a government position is under someone with authority to abuse the system.
 - b. The system is designed to protect those within the ruling system who have the most authority.

5:9 - But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

- A. Why is this corruption tolerated? Why is corruption not rooted out completely? Why isn't a revolution better than a corrupt government?
- B. The alternative to corrupt government is total collapse and chaos.
- C. Thus, the illustration of the cultivated fields. We only find cultivated fields in cultures where there is some form of ruling class, government institution, and authoritative system.
- D. Rebellion and a culture without borders, without a system, without citizenship, without laws cannot have cultivated fields. (Genesis
- E. Organization is necessary for roads, waterworks, education, economy, family.
- F. This is why Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:1-4: *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high*

positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

1. Paul is not saying pray that your leaders are Christians
 2. Paul is not telling Christians to rebel against Pagan kings
 3. Paul is saying (as does Jeremiah) to pray for your leaders so that you can have a nonchaotic existence where you can live your lives, work your fields, raise your families, abound in righteous deeds and lead others to the Truth of God’s eternal kingdom.
- G. Jeremiah 29:7, “*Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*”

NEW TOPIC: Balancing Wealth with Contentment in Life (5:10-6:6)

5:10 - He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

- A. Provisions are necessary, but the concept of wealth is a distraction from the world
- B. Ultimately, contentment with what you have along with joy in life is the best thing you can have. And, if you have it, realize it is a gift from God (as in 5:19)
- C. If you think life is about money and wealth you have missed the meaning of life and turned to a false meaning, an empty philosophy, a temporal existence, because:
 1. If money is your goal, you will never reach your goal. You can never have enough. Plus, on your way to nowhere you will lose you chance for joy and contentment.
 2. If advancement in your career is your goal, then you will never rise high enough. Also, you will miss out on joy and contentment.

5:11 - When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

- A. Increase of goods (income, money, position, etc.) is meaningless because:
 1. As they increase the owner’s appetite also increases. There is always this empty craving that is impossible to fill.
 2. Eventually the owner has more than he can use or manage or eat or play with, etc. The lover of stuff will eventually get to the point that all he can do is look at them, because he doesn’t know how to enjoy them.

5:12 - Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

- A. A Contrast:
 1. The man who works will always sleep at night. His sleep is independent of how much he has to eat. He may be poor or he may have a full refrigerator. But, the worker sleeps.
 2. The rich man cannot sleep:
 - i. He ate too much?
 - ii. He has too many worries about potential loss
 - iii. He is driven by thoughts and desires to make more

5:13 - There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,

- A. Problem: Hoarding to the point of hurting oneself.

5:14 - and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.

- A. Problem: Wealth can be suddenly lost in a bad investment or a bad economy
- B. The man had a son to give his inheritance to, but the inheritance was lost.

5:15 - As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

- A. Problem: Wealth is lost at death...every time.
- B. This is the ultimate point for identifying the futility of pursuing wealth.

5:16 - This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?

- A. Pursuing wealth is a toiling after the wind.
- B. If wealth is not lost in life, then it is definitely lost in death.
- C. A grievous evil? Wealth seems so important, but it will always be lost. Which means the gaining of wealth is like catching the wind:
 - 1. You cannot catch the wind, like you cannot get enough wealth
 - 2. If you do catch the wind you have really caught nothing, like when you finally catch wealth you die and find out you have nothing

5:17 - Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

- A. And, ultimately, not only does the man die in the end and lose his wealth...
- B. The days that the man did live gaining wealth was spent eating meals alone, clouded with thoughts of how to make and manage wealth.
- C. The man's meals were not a time of relaxing, celebration, and contentment, but times of anxiety in his mind, sickness in his body and anger in his soul.

5:18 - Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

- A. This is the balance:
 - 1. You must work...this is your lot in life...embrace it.
 - 2. You must work for food...you cannot escape the fact you have an appetite and need food.
 - 3. Point: Labor, eat, drink and enjoy your work and your food!
 - 4. That's it! If you can manage this then you have received a gift from God!

5:19 - Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

5:20 - For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

- A. We remember the good times, and tend to forget the bad.
- B. This is a gift from God!

Ecclesiastes 6

6:1 - There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind:

- A. Point of 6:1-6 is the worst case scenario: To have the wealth without the ability to enjoy it.
- B.

6:2 - a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.

6:3 - If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

- A. Three theoretical needs for the good life:
 - a. Wealth... as in “wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires”
 - b. Long life...as in “lives many years, so that the days of his years are many”
 - c. Many children....as in “fathers a hundred children”

6:4 - For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.

- A. The stillborn child is better than the man with wealth, long life and many children
- B. “he also has no burial” could (and, does in some translations) refer to the stillborn child who may not even have a funeral.
- C. The stillborn child comes and goes in darkness without experiencing the futility of life, the vanity of wealth and the pain of labor.
- D. In this sense, the stillborn child has the best monopoly card: Advance directly to ‘Go’ and collect \$200!



6:5 - Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he.

6:6 - Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

NEW TOPIC: Three Proverbs (6:7-9)

6:7 - All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.

- A. The topic of appetite.
- B. All men (wise, fool, wealthy, poor) have to eat.
- C. They can never escape their humanity through any of these things:
 - 1. Wealth...they still have to eat.
 - 2. Wise... they still have to eat.
 - 3. Knowledge...they still have to eat.
 - 4. The fool and the poor still have to eat.

6:8 - For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?

- A. Even a life spent in pursuit of knowledge leaves a man with an appetite.
- B. The educated have no advantage over the poor man even if the poor man knows how to behave socially acceptable.
- C. Both have the same problem: Their life is driven by hunger or appetite. We are mortal.

6:9 - Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

- A. This third parable seems to come to the same conclusion.
- B. It is better to be satisfied with what you have (or, what you can see as in “is the sight of the eyes”) than to have an uncontrolled, unsatisfied appetite that drives the man on and on:
 - 1. Appetite for wealth drives the wealthy man on to a place of dissatisfaction.
 - 2. Appetite for knowledge (which sets up the next verses) drives the man of knowledge to a place of frustration.

NEW TOPIC: Adam Knew, Learn it and Accept it (6:10-7:4)

These are three verses that take us back to the beginning of mankind when the frustration began with Adam. The Hebrew word “adam” which is translated “man” is used four times. The use of words such as “known”, “knows what is good”, “named” and “Adam” may be direct links to the events of Genesis 2-3 where Adam was given knowledge and named all things, but desired more knowledge than he was allowed and tried to contest for the knowledge of his stronger authority, God.

6:10 - Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

- A. “Adam” (‘man’) was taken from the “adama” (‘soil’) and was limited to his human mortality.
- B. Adam in his human state named all the living things, and, so, understood them and had mastery over them.
- C. Adam was the first teacher. He was the one who categorized everything and explained everything. There is no need to go beyond Adam’s knowledge, understanding or beyond his teaching. It was revealed to him by God and mastered by Adam.
- D. But, even Adam was not content. Even Adam pushed to know more. Thus, the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, the knowledge that would make mortal dirt man understand the things only God knew.
- E. Adam’s quest for the knowledge belonging to God led to his rebellion against God.
- F. God crushed the rebellion

6:11 - The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?

- A. Today we find ourselves in a similar position. Not content with the knowledge we have been given.
- B. Not only do we have an appetite for food or want more wealth. We also want knowledge that is beyond our ability.
- C. The knowledge that Adam obtained from the Tree was of no advantage to man (Adam)

6:12 - For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

- A. No one is going to go beyond what Adam knew, named, understood or learned.
- B. No one can answers the questions that are hidden in God.
- C. No one can tell man what God has not permitted man to know.

Ecclesiastes 7 (ESV)

Ultimately, the day of your death is better than the day you are born. (7:1-4)

7:1 - A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

- A. A “good name” is secured at death. At death your deeds are sealed. Your reward is set.

7:2 - It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

- A. “house of mourning” celebrates the good life of the “good name.”
- B. “precious ointment” refers to luxury, “house of feasting” is a place where you can be distracted from the importance of a “good name” and the futility of life. Mistakes are made there.

7:3 - Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

- A. The heart is made glad when you stay focused on the things that really matter.

7:4 - The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

7:5 - It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

7:6 - For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.

7:7 - Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

7:8 - Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

7:9 - Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

7:10 - Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

7:11 - Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

7:12 - For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

7:13 - Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

7:14 - In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.