

“FEAR GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Introduction.

We are talking about life under the sun. Life here on earth that is characterized as a quickly fleeting shadow, a puff of smoke that quickly dissipates, a vaper, mist, fog. A striving after the wind.

But our text before us doesn't say that. Solomon in all his wisdom doesn't apply such language to the topic before us, the worship of God. That is one thing under the sun that is not a striving after the wind.

When you go up to the house of God guard your steps, watch your steps, be wise and circumspect. I like that word circumspect. It means cautious, careful, vigilant.

Why? Well because it is the house of God and anyone who is wise knows there is only one way to approach God. Solomon ends our text with “God is the one you must fear.” Fear God.

I am going to bring the ending to the beginning to help us rightly divide the truth before us.

The fear of the Lord.

Our entire passage can be summarized by the last words, fear God. We will see this again when we get to the last two verses of Ecclesiastes which summarize the entire book, fear God.

Those who are acquainted with the Bible, and especially the OT know that it is a truism with the people of God that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

This phrase often hits our ears sideways. It sounds strange to us, it is not how we generally talk about God. We NT Christians can find this confusing.

Now preachers are usually quick to tell us there are two kinds of fear when it comes to God. There is a frightful fear, a kind of terror like, “I'm afraid of the dark or monsters in the closet or whatever gives you the shivers.”

This is the fear of unbelievers who hate God, who rebel against God, the sinful fear that drives one away from a holy God. The fear of being exposed by God that makes one run away from God.

The fear of the Lord is another kind of fear. In an effort to be alliterative with frightful fear, we will call it filial fear. The only problem being we don't know that filial means. It is like family, it is the fear of a child toward a loving father, a fear that desires not to displease or disappoint.

To help us really get at the meaning of this kind of fear, let me ask you a question.

Will there be fear in heaven? Will there be fear in heaven? If we answer no there will not be, then it is clear we do not yet truly understand this kind of fear of the Lord we are talking about.

We read in Psalm 89:7, "God is greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones." The spotless, glorious angel in heaven cover their faces in holy fear.

Psalm 147:11 ***The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him***, in those that hope in his mercy.

Heaven is a world where love, joy and fear dwell together in perfect harmony. Heaven is a fearfully ecstatic place of joy and wonder. The fear in heaven is a happy fear. The fear is not a fear of dread or a servile fear, but an awe-inspired, reverential fear, a delightful filial fear.

So, in the OT devotion to God is described as the fear of the Lord and it is the beginning of wisdom. This is a fear that rises out of a great love for God. In the NT the fear of God is the right response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His righteous fulfillment of all the Law, and the deliverance from the wrath of God.

The boldest saint on earth, if he has a right view of God and himself, will approach God with no less fear and reverence and deference than the holy angels.

This is the kind of fear that comes when one truly comprehends we are dealing with the Creator God of the universe who wields supreme power and authority, the God with whom we have to do.

Genesis 22 is a good illustration of this kind of fear.

God tells Abraham to go and sacrifice his only son. This is the ultimate test, a challenge that defies all human understanding. Isaac is the son of promise, Isaac is the son Abraham and Sarah had prayed and waited for, for 25 years. This is utterly incomprehensible.

Abraham without hesitation obeys God, he loads a donkey with wood and heads off to Mt Moriah. He builds an altar, puts the wood on it, binds his son, lays him on the wood, raises his knife and the angel of the Lord stops him.

At that point God tells Abraham He now knows Abraham fears God. Abraham's fear of God is faith that God is perfect and wise and will keep His promises.

Now I know that you know that I am God, and that you trust me and have complete faith in me.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, Guard your steps and guard your lips, don't be too quick to speak.

So to read backwards from 5:7, fear God by being careful in all your dealings with God.

Solomon turns to the subject of worship, and suddenly the word vanity disappears. He doesn't call the holy worship of the holy God vanity or chasing after the wind.

But vanity is brought into worship by the fool, by worshipers who have no heart for God.

Like everything else we do under the sun, going to church is fraught with danger. When we walk into the church house, the house of God, we must be especially vigilant.

Why must we be so careful? Because of who is in the church.

On the one hand, God is in the church. That calls for care, for fear of the Lord.

On the other hand, fools are in the church. Jesus said it would be like this, there would be wheat and weeds until the end.

There is a difference between who a fool approaches God or talks about God and the way a wise man does.

Let your words to God be few.

Prayer.

“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.”

Solomon is telling us to keep our words few and brief.

The first time Jesus taught the disciples to pray He gave them a very short prayer to pray and He called out and warned against being like others who prayed long, wordy prayers.

Matthew 6:7-8 When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer.

So is, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.”

So is “Help me” and “Thank you.”

Be real, be honest. Be willing to be silent, to listen, to rest, to wait. Be self-aware and be God-aware.

Prayerless prayers are the sacrifice of fools.

Thoughtless words or ill-considered words are the sacrifice of fools.

How often have our minds thought and our lips moved, but without the Spirit, without our hearts engaged? What is prayer and worship but an appeal to the Father heart of God, and how is it that we would seek His heart without bringing our own heart?

This is an admonishment against our superficial religion, going through the motions, speaking many words with little awareness of God. The danger of empty ritual was as real today as it was then.

Vows

And the same counsel applies to vows to God.

This is Solomon's second instruction on how we must be very careful in our dealings with God.

The more basic and practical matter of prayer, this to a special exercise of religion. Our prayers are to be daily and ceaseless, vows infrequent and carefully weighed.

Solomon is warning about the kinds of mistakes fools make in worship. This is a warning about a specific kind of speaking before God.

Be careful how you use your words with God. Be very careful and consider long and hard before you make a vow.

In the OT a vow was generally an obligation with a religious reason or context, some kind of extraordinary commitment. Remember Hannah's vow made in the temple that if God gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord for the Lord's service.

We see an example of this in the NT with Ananias and Sapphira. They made a show of doing one thing, saying one thing and doing another.

If we consider it of utmost importance to keep our word with another person, then how much more ought we to keep our word with God.

The man who makes a vow and then doesn't keep it is a fool.

At the funeral of Bennie Martin it was observed that he was a man of his word. Truth and integrity matter to him and he lived that way.

For us under the Gospel let our baptismal vows, our profession of faith, our ordination vows, and our marriage vows be sufficient for the vows we take before God.

God takes no pleasure in fools. Watch what you say in God's house, in God's presence and in the world.

Verse 5 takes the caution further. Don't let your mouth get you into trouble.

How often has our mouth gotten us into trouble? Told a lie, make a gross exaggeration or misrepresentation. How often have we been guilty of slander, liable, gossip? How often have we said something we regretted?

Matthew 5:37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Fear God and let the fear of God show in your words and actions. Fear God, this is the remedy to heartless prayers and worship, and to rash vows.

God is in heaven and we are on earth. Let your words reflect that great difference.

Let your words about others be few.

Guard your step, watch your step when you go up to the house of the Lord. Not only is God there, but there are sinners there. Churches are full of sin.

This can't be avoided and church ought not to be avoided because of it. We are made for community, two are better than one, man is not made to be alone or isolated.

And it certainly doesn't mean you should stop going there. He clearly says "**when**" you go, not if.

Know that it will be that way, and know that doesn't mean God is not there or not working.

Be aware that there is trouble inside, those who are talkative, arrogant, hypocritical, judgmental, people who say one thing and do another, who don't practice what they preach. They may be selfish and self-absorbed, impatient, intolerant, clueless about themselves.

Be aware of your verbal sins, where you are most easily tempted. That is reason to be circumspect.

Don't be quick to judge. Don't be pointing out all the specks in everyone's eyes. Don't let unwholesome words come out.

Don't be gossiping, it is foolish speech. To God it is the speech of a fool.

It is not your calling or place to pass on gossip or to pass judgment on another person. It is not your calling to point out the faults of another. The talebearer is a fool.

We live in a world of many words, awash in words. Mass communication and social media send out a torrent of words, a tsunami of words, a fire hydrant of words.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Conclusion and application.

Guard your steps when you go up to the house of God.

Yes, be wise and not a fool. Yes, don't make the sacrifice of fools. Yes, guard your lips. Yes, be aware the house of God is full of sinful creatures. But most of all know that you are before the Creator God who is in heaven. Most of all know that you are before the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and secures a place for us before the very throne of God. Most of all remember that you are welcome to come in because Jesus has already paid for our admission. Most of all remember that He wants our presence, our hearts, and for us to be still and know that He is God.

Under the sun when you go up to the house of God, guard your steps and guard your lips and above all fear God.