

194. Why did the citizens of the country accept the young lad? Why later was he rejected?
195. Why was the first king rejected?
196. How does Solomon identify this whole affair?
197. If the lad who came "out of prison" is to be understood in a prophetic sense, who would he be, and where did he come from? Discuss.
198. How would this same verse be explained if it were interpreted historically?
199. What is the meaning of the Hebrew term "kesil"?
200. In the text, on whom does this term reflect?
201. What demonstrates the insecurity of the king's office?
202. The miser's money and the young lad's success have what in common?
203. What is Solomon's final comment in this section?

D. GUIDELINES FOR THE WORK OF WORSHIP 5:1-9

1. Watch your step in God's house. 5:1a

TEXT 5:1a

1a Guard your steps as you go to the house of God,

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1a

114. Since vanity is still under consideration, where are we now to guard against it?
115. What would the house of God be in Solomon's day?
116. Why should one guard his steps when going to the temple?

PARAPHRASE 5:1a

Watch your step when you come to the temple. Remember it is God's house.

COMMENT 5:1a

For the first time the Preacher resorts to admonition. It is direct and extended. He is concerned about the possible corruption of the heart as it reaches toward God in worship. He is observing the citizenry making their way to the temple, turning their feet toward the proper places, and moving through the correct procedures. However, he is also aware that their approach is more formalistic than genuine, more ritualistic than contrite. Since God is the object of worship and therefore has ultimate worth, to worship Him in word only would be ultimate folly. The "house of God" is undoubtedly the temple as the synagogue has not been established, and there was not a plurality of houses where God was worshiped.

"Guard your steps" is to be taken figuratively for examining your heart. Make sure your motives are pure and in line with your external orthodoxy. The Preacher is not implying that one should not approach God in the temple or that external acts are unimportant. He is suggesting that it is possible to give the appearance of worshiping God correctly when actually nothing is happening between you and God. The vanity of hypocritical worship is but another illustration of the vanity of all things. It is likely that his insertion of vain worship at this particular place has a very definite purpose. It is because men are out of step with God that they are out of step with one another. An improper approach to worship leads to the inequitable situation discussed in chapters one through four and also the illustrations which follow. God may be supplanted by numerous other loves. The Preacher is extremely pointed in this application (cf. 5:8-10). We are drawn to the evil activities of men which undoubtedly result from an improper attitude in God's house. Men oppress the poor, deny justice and righteousness, and have an unhealthy love for money and abundance. One way to escape the futility of the things of this world is to be in harmony, in act and spirit, with the will of God.

Much is made of this passage by those who hold to a late

date and non-Solomonic authorship. It is argued that the short-lived joy and dedication of the people to the things of God after the Exile was but a "flush of enthusiastic faith." The people soon developed a hardening of heart. One could see the outward signs of worship were in harmony with the rules, but the spirit of the act was far from what God desired. They cite such passages as Nehemiah 13:10-20 and Malachi 1:8 as evidence. One could not argue successfully against the lack of spiritual sincerity on the part of Israel, for it is manifestly denounced in the Minor Prophets. However, to conclude that such hypocrisy was limited to that particular generation, and that the rebuke and admonition of the Preacher would not be just as applicable in Solomon's day, is also indefensible. As a matter of fact, men in every generation have been guilty of meaningless sacrifices in worship. From the time of Cain and Abel to the present day the history of man has been the same in respect to worship. Every age needs a clear voice calling men back to outward form and inward feeling; to truth and spirit; but not only to sacrifice, but a detailed adherence to the will of the One to whom the sacrifice is offered. Read I Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:33; Proverbs 21:3; Mark 12:40. Surely in the day of Solomon, with the corruption of justice and the erection of altars of false gods on the very soil of Israel, there was a need to admonish men to greater consistency in their performance in the house of God. Similar instruction is found in Proverbs 1:15-16 where Solomon indicates that the direction of one's steps betrays the intent of the heart.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:1a

204. What is it that now concerns the preacher as he observes the citizenry?
205. Identify the house of God. Why would it not be the synagogue?
206. How should one understand the admonition to "guard

- your steps”?
207. What is likely the reason for the insertion here concerning the need to worship God correctly?
 208. List the sins listed or suggested in 5:8-10. What proper attitude would eliminate this evil?
 209. How would you meet the argument that this type of hypocrisy had to be during the time of Malachi?
 210. Give evidence that men have always had a tendency to go through acts of worship, but in doing so failed to do all that God commanded.
 211. What does Solomon suggest may be learned concerning one’s intentions by simply watching the direction of the feet?
2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words.
5:1b-7

TEXT 5:1b-7

- 1b and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.
- 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.
- 3 For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.
- 4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!
- 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.
- 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
- 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather fear God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

117. Give evidence that the "sacrifice of fools" is evil.
118. How can one commit evil and not know it? Discuss.
119. What reason is given why one should not be hasty or impulsive?
120. What is likened unto a dream?
121. What is likened unto much effort?
122. List numerous vows taken by Christians today. Are some of these the sacrifice of fools? Discuss.
123. What is it that God does not delight in?
124. When is it better not to vow?
125. In what way can your speech cause you to sin?
126. Since the temple is the house of God, who is the "messenger"?
127. What is the opposite of speaking "many words"?

PARAPHRASE 5:1b-7

Approach the house of God with a spirit that prepares your heart to be slow to speak but swift to hear. A man is a fool who offers God empty words. Such a man offers the sacrifice of fools, and he is not even sensitive concerning his evil deeds. It is improper for you to stand before God and speak without seriously weighing your words. Think! It will benefit your sacrifice if you remember the differences between God and you. He is in heaven, and you are upon the earth! Very likely you will be a man of few words if you keep that truth in mind.

When one engages in many different activities during the day and is occupied with busy work, he will toss and turn upon his bed, and his head will be filled with dreams. Also, a fool is known by his much talk. A fool is also known by making meaningless vows before God. If you do make a vow, don't be late in paying it! God doesn't delight in fools. Pay what you vow to pay. Consider this; it is actually better that you do not vow than vow and do not pay.

It is the problem of your tongue again. Your speech can cause you to sin. Think about that. And consider, too, that it won't help to run to the priest of God and say that it was all a big mistake. The priest will be there to collect what is now rightfully God's, and you will find no escape. Why should God be made angry by your many words and you find the work of your hands destroyed?

Let it be a warning to you—dreams and meaningless promises are feasting on the wind and empty. Simply show respect to God!

COMMENT 5:1b-7

The purpose of this section is to prevent one from acting the part of a fool in the most important of all activities of men. One is personally responsible for his own behavior when he comes before God. Evidently one can rise above the circumstances around him and behave in such a way that will number him among the wise. It is to the wise, or the potentially wise, that the Preacher addresses himself as he suggests that one should not be "shocked" at what he sees in the perversion of worship or justice (v. 8)—just be certain that you "guard your steps as you go to the house of God."

The activities of the fool as described in this section are not to be emulated. The reader has been introduced to such "fools" before (cf. 4:5, 13). It is a term which suggests stupidity and ignorance rather than evil or brutishness. It does not carry the idea of one who is perverted or wicked, but rather one who is lacking in common sense and the ability to do things correctly. Note the following characteristics of the fool that the wise man will avoid: The fool fails to listen to God; he offers an unacceptable sacrifice; he is ignorant of his own evil activities and is hasty and impulsive in his speech; he fails to remember that he is the created one and God is the Creator; he expends pointless energy in meaningless activities; he is either late in paying or fails to pay the vow he made to God;

more than this, he made the vow even though he realized that he would not be able to pay it; he attempts to go back on his word, making God angry with him and thus having his work destroyed; he discovers that both his dreams and promises are empty; and, in addition to all of this, he fails to fear God which is the ultimate duty of man (12:13).

v. 1 One does not see a picture of a hardened, rebellious, heretic who sets himself against God and is in opposition to all that is holy. The individual observed as a fool attends worship. He is not a fool because he comes to stand before God, but because he does not come to listen, but to talk. And in the talking he yields to the temptation to promise much more than he is capable of delivering. James undoubtedly had these words in mind when he wrote, "But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20). The leaders of Israel had a solemn responsibility to read the Law to the people. In like manner, the people had a solemn responsibility to listen to the Law. One of the last acts of Moses was to command the people to observe all the words of the Law. The reading, hearing, and observing of the Law, preceded the ability to fear the Lord. Moses said, "Assemble the people, the men and the women, and the children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. And their children, who have not known will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land where you are about to cross over the Jordan to possess it" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13).

To "draw near to listen" would be tantamount to bringing their behavior into harmony with the expressed will of God. This would mean that the many grievous sins being committed throughout the land would cease. To "hear God" has the same force as obeying God. (Cf. I Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:33; Hosea 6:6.) The foolishness depicted is heightened because the one who offers the sacrifice of fools has not stopped long enough to listen to find out what he should be doing,

and he is thus ignorant of the fact that he is doing evil.

The "sacrifice of fools" is not a sacrifice of blood or physical substance. It is rather the words hastily and impulsively offered to God. It would include promises which cannot be kept or meaningless chatter that slips so easily from the lips but never finds its way through the heart. Evidently "words" have always been considered "sacrifices" to God. When one comes to God through Jesus Christ, he should be aware that he "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

v. 2 The goal here is to keep your words few and mean what you say. The motivation for making your word sacrifice a thoughtful one is the fact that you are standing in the presence of God. It is the Creator that you have come to worship. You have been instructed where to go and what to do when you arrive. Now, don't play the part of a fool and negate your worship act. "To bring up a matter" suggests that what is about to be discussed originates from the imagination of the worshiper rather than from the command of God. Since God has not commanded the vow, perhaps it would be better if you did not make it.

Sacrifices of fools are not limited to hasty promises. Vain repetitions, which of course are repeated without feeling and become just so many empty words, are also considered unacceptable sacrifices before God (Matthew 6:7).

There isn't any doubt in the mind of the Preacher that God and man are not equal. The strong assertion of this verse that "God is in *heaven* and you are on the *earth*," clearly manifests the distinction between God and men. The temple was built for God, not man. The worship is before God, not man. The "fool" is man, not God. The entire context indicates an awareness that the author is cognizant of God's preeminence. The fact that he speaks of man being of the "earth" implies that he was *created* from dust and therefore should not forget his rightful place. It is on the basis of this distinction between God and man that he makes his appeal. When man comes before God his words should be few. This same idea is under

consideration in 6:10. Here Solomon argues that man (Adam) knows that he came from the ground (adamah). He states it clearly when he says "it is known what man is." It is in the light of this argument that his appeal is to the common sense of the one who has been created. Such a one should keep his guard up when he comes before the Creator and protect himself against the temptation to offer the sacrifice of fools.

A classic example in contrast between the fool who cries loud and long for his god to hear and the one who comes before God in correct fashion is given in I Kings 18:25-40. Here the prophets of Baal cried from morning until noon and again they "raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice." Yet the account states, "there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention." In what took less than twenty seconds for Elijah to speak before God, he offered a meaningful prayer that resulted in fire falling from the Lord which consumed his sacrifice, along with the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench."

v. 3 It is because of the "multitude of business" or the task in which the individual is embroiled that he dreams. The dream, which is an experience that is shared by most, is declared in this instance to be the result of much activity. In like manner, a man is discovered to be a fool because of his many words. Dreams are not necessarily the mark of a fool but stand in this instance only as a comparison to illustrate his point. Once more he is insisting that our words should be few.

vs. 4-6 He now turns from the subject of prayer to that of vows. One is considered a fool if he is either late in paying his vow to God or fails to pay it. In either situation, God does not find pleasure in such activity, or lack of it! As noted above, the vow stems from the mind of the worshiper and not from God. Vows were not a part of God's commands and the laws governing them so indicate. "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God shall surely require it of

you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised" (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

There is a time when it is better not to vow. Such a time obviously, is when you vow but do not fulfill it. A promise is binding among men of integrity. How much more so a promise before God! Yet, if God does not command the promise, how foolish is one who makes promises that he neither intends to keep nor has the ability to keep.

Vows have come into vogue among many churches today. There are faith-promise rallies, faith-care rallies, and numerous methods of either raising financial commitments or time and/or talent commitments through the use of special days and programs. Whereas there is nothing wrong with such activities, and in many churches much good results from them, a proper text in preparing the people to come before God with their "promise" would certainly be the passage under consideration here. Sometimes zeal in promoting for new records and higher goals exceeds wisdom exercised in the practical application of attaining them. The Preacher has a wise word for the church today: "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

The idea of your "speech" in verse six could just as easily be "mouth," or "tongue." Yet, Jesus taught that it is indeed the "heart" that causes one to sin (Mark 7:21). The heart in this instance finds expression through the mouth and more specifically in the form of a hasty vow. Now, new words must be formed as you come before the "messenger of God" (the priest) and confess that it was indeed a mistake! However, both the irresponsible vow and the appeal to the priest are to be avoided. The priest acts only as a representative between you and God. This is why God is angry at your appeal and not the priest. Your vow was made to God and now the covenant has been established. God expects payment. To utter such a vow or make such an appeal places one in the position that his words cause God to become angry with him. God's anger is

now directed toward the individual (fool), and nothing he does will succeed. God destroys the work of his hand. The one in Solomon's day could expect some act of judgment from the Lord. Not all evil was immediately recompensed, however, and thus the ones who were guilty of offering the sacrifices of fools continued in such activity for a time (8:11).

Verse seven is a summary. It captures both the idea of empty prayers and empty vows and admonishes toward a more positive, fruitful activity: fear God. It is not to be assumed that the Preacher considers everyone who reads his message as guilty before God. He is suggesting that there are those who will follow the foolish ways and that one should avoid that pathway. In Wisdom Literature, the concept of "fearing God" has a marked prominence in the priorities of men and also a distinct meaning. It is both the doing of good and the departing from evil. David wrote, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:11-14).

Solomon has now completed his discourse on formalistic worship and the futility of such. He ends the discussion with a positive emphasis. He declares that the better way is to fear God. He has given sufficient cause why one is indeed a fool should he follow the way of thoughtless, insincere prayers or vows. Strong religious terminology such as God, temple, priest, sin, vows, and sacrifice, offer a marked and inescapable relationship to religious behavior. Perhaps his appeal is more direct and carries the feeling of admonition because of the seriousness of the matter. Nothing is of graver consequence than man's relationship to God. Perhaps he could not refrain from "preaching" in the light of this truth.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:1b-7

212. What is the most important of all activities of men?
213. One should not be "shocked" at perversion in what two areas?
214. What does the term "fool" imply in this context?
215. List the ten characteristics of fools as described in this section.
216. What temptation does the fool yield to as he stands before God?
217. According to James 1:19-20, the fool should have followed what advice?
218. What objective did Moses have in mind when he commanded the people to always have God's law read publicly?
219. To "hear God" is equal to what?
220. What is the "sacrifice of fools"?
221. How could one negate his worship act?
222. Give evidence that Solomon does not think of man as equal with God.
223. How long did Elijah speak before God?
224. How long did the prophets of Baal cry to their god?
225. Are dreams the mark of a fool? Discuss.
226. In the making of vows, when would one be considered a fool?
227. Does the vow originate in the mind of the worshiper, or is it a command of God? Discuss in the light of Deuteronomy 23:21-23.
228. When is it better not to vow?
229. Jesus taught that evil issues from what area?
230. Why, then, does Solomon say that your "speech" causes you to sin?
231. Who is the "messenger of God"?
232. Define the "fear of the Lord." (Cf. Psalms 34:11-14.)
233. Why does Solomon turn to "preaching" in this section?

3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all. 5:8-9

TEXT 5:8-9

8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.

9 After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

128. One should not be shocked at what two areas of inequity?
129. Is there a "line" of authority in the land? Explain.
130. What kind of a king is an advantage to the land?

PARAPHRASE 5:8-9

Do you not see the way the poor are being oppressed, and the denial of righteousness and justice that is found throughout the land? This should not shock you. At least don't allow it to have this effect. It will help to remember that every official in the land has a higher official watching over him—even the king. There is an advantage in having a king over the whole cultivated land, for by his authority he approves the endeavors of men and defends his subjects against wrong, unnecessary burdens, and violence,—poor government is better than no government at all!

COMMENT 5:8-9

Disharmony among men is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship. One should not be shocked at whatever he

sees throughout the land when men fail so miserably in their response to God. Once Judas had betrayed Jesus, it was a short step to press into the forbidden inner section of the temple to desecrate it by casting the price of blood upon the floor. In like manner, when men make a mockery of public worship, going through the outward forms but denying the true spirit of worship, corruption runs rampant throughout the land. It is *only* when men are right before God that they are capable of living together in peace and harmony.

Oppression, corruption, unrighteousness and denial of justice are common sights in any land where God is truly shut out of the heart. The poor are especially susceptible to oppression for they have neither the means nor the authority to champion their own cause (note the comments on 4:1). The rich men, wielding some authority, failed to justly deal with the decisions which involved the poor. If the authorities were in a proper relationship with God, none of the evils mentioned would be tolerated in the land. Note the words of Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Why should one not be shocked at such behaviour? These two verses have been variously interpreted. It is clear that certain evils are common throughout the land. It is not clear, however, what is meant by "one official watches over another" or what is meant by "a king who cultivates the field." Whatever the interpretation, it must be the reason why one should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land.

There is an implied line of authority in control. Perhaps Solomon is suggesting that each person who is above another is taking advantage of him and practicing similar graft and corruption. Since this practice is so open and permeates the entire society from the lowest to the highest level, then one should not marvel at the matter. The purpose, however, is to comfort the poor who seem to be at the very bottom, and are not, themselves, taking advantage of another. He speaks to them in verse nine with the comforting thought that the king

(and in this instance many believe it to be a reference to God) is over the entire cultivated land—that is, the land where all the activities are taking place. This truth, that God will bring about ultimate justice and that all evil deeds are recorded and will one day be destroyed, is in harmony with the major theme of the book. It is not comforting to one who is imprisoned or denied daily bread, to realize that some day even the “officials” will come into judgment before the true “King,” but it is all the comfort they have. There is an advantage to having such a King.

Solomon is not building a case for the farmer by suggesting that a land who has a king who is interested in and participates in agriculture is a blessing to the land. Although some translations lend themselves to this interpretation, it should be noted that the purpose of the Preacher in this section is to bring comfort to the poor and explain why they should not be shocked at the prevalent evil in the land. If the king is a man and not God, as seems most reasonable, then in the whole land there is an advantage to realize that a final authority exists and that although he will, on occasion, close his eyes to improprieties and even be guilty himself of similar charges, he will be called into judgment before God.

On this verse, Martin Luther has written the following observations which prove to be good advice for Christians today:

The book consequently teaches thee to let thine heart have rest and peace, and not to trouble and worry thyself over much when things go wrongly, but to accustom thyself to be able to say, when the devil brings malice, injustice, violence, and burdens on the poor, ‘Such is the way of the world, but God will judge and avenge it.’ And again, when thou seest things going well, learn to say, ‘God be praised, who, after all, so rules, that we do not merely suffer evil and injustice, but receive also much good.’ Moreover, let every man, according to his rank, and God’s command, do his work with the best industry: other things let him commend to God; let him be patient and wait for Him who

is able to find out and judge the ungodly and unjust. He that cannot lift a great stone, let him leave it lying and lift what he can. Wherefore, when thou seest that kings, princes and lords misuse their power, that judges and advocates take bribes and allow causes to sink or swim as they can, being wise and sensible thou wilt think within thyself,—‘God will sometime bring about a better state.’

Futility is still the theme. How fleeting is life, and all too often how very fleeting the pleasures of life. One great lesson gained from reading Ecclesiastes is the awareness that men have *always* been troubled with the fact that any truly enjoyable experience on earth is very transitory, and in some cases never experienced by those who sojourn here. The Preacher’s message brings us to a deeper appreciation of Jesus and the revelation He brings us. Those who have experienced the grace offered through Christ have found the secret of finding joy in the midst of the temporary. He also has discovered an explanation of the corruption, denial of justice, and oppression of the poor. It does not mean that the Christian either approves or tolerates such when it is within his power to rectify wrong, but it does mean that such evil does not destroy him and he is able to triumph in victory even when he is the recipient of the injustice.

FACT QUESTIONS 5:8-9

234. What is the inevitable result of hypocritical worship?
235. Why are the poor usually the ones who suffer the most?
236. What is meant by “one official watches over another”?
237. Do the officials practice evil? Explain.
238. In what way is discovering the purpose of Solomon a key in interpreting the verses?
239. Is Solomon praising the farmer? Discuss.
240. What possible meanings are given to verse nine?
241. What theme is Solomon still illustrating?
242. What advantage does the Christian have over the person

in Solomon's day? (Discuss in the light that he lives in a similar world where corruption is so prevalent?)

E. ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE FUTILITY OF RICHES 5:10—6:12

1. Riches by themselves are vain. 5:10-20

a. They do not satisfy. 5:10-12

TEXT 5:10-12

- 10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.
- 11 When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?
- 12 The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 5:10-12

- 131. What attitude toward money will keep one from being satisfied with it?
- 132. What is identified as vanity?
- 133. What else must be increased when one increases his possessions?
- 134. What advantage does the poor man have over the rich man?