

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 8)

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

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In England, there are certain protocols one must follow when in the presence of the queen. There are certain ways to bow and certain ways of properly addressing the monarch. In America, although we don't have these protocols even for our leaders, we still have these types of protocols in our families. We don't typically address our parents by their first names, and we typically don't boss our parents around. There is a line that is drawn between being close to your parents and giving them the respect they deserve. Similarly, with God there is a line that we shouldn't cross, but that we so often do cross. Do we give God the respect He deserves when we pray, or have we forgotten to whom we are talking?

In Ecclesiastes, *Qohelet* reminds us of our place in our relationship with God. Remember that *Qohelet* searched the world for satisfaction but ended up empty. He concluded that we should be content and find enjoyment in what we have rather than chasing after things that do not satisfy. But in chapter 5 he begins to discuss the way we can find true satisfaction, and it begins with understanding our place before God. In 5:1 *Qohelet* tells readers to guard their steps when they approach the Temple. When we approach God we should have the right attitude. We should be ready to listen rather than quick to speak (vv. 2-3). The haughty fools who come before God think that they are a blessing to God by being in His presence, that it's to God's benefit that they are there, and that God will listen because of their many words. Jesus also warns against such an attitude in Matthew 6:7. It's not just about how much you talk, but rather it's about having a heart that is quiet and ready to listen, a heart that doesn't boast about having anything special to offer God. We must know our place. We are down here, and God is up there in heaven.

Many places in the Bible link the heart to the mouth. Psalm 19:14 makes it clear that the words of your mouth are linked to the meditation of your heart. Matthew 12:34 and 15:18 says that it's not what we eat that makes us unclean, but what we say, because that reflects our heart. And Romans 10:9-10 says that we are saved through faith expressed in our heart and mouth. The mouth is tightly linked with the heart. On the golf course one of the strangers that I played with on Mondays sometimes would swear when he made a mistake. If that language comes out of his

mouth when he's having fun, then what must come out in less pleasant experiences, and what does it say about his heart?

We must have the right heart when we approach God. It's not just about our behavior at church, but even when we approach God in prayer. Don't come to God thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. God likes it when we talk to Him, but don't think you are doing Him such a big favor. Be humble and ready to listen rather than quick to speak, for the heart expresses itself in the words of your mouth. Today most Christians like to think of God as a friend. It's true that through Jesus we have unprecedented access to the Father, but don't forget who He is. We no longer sing the hymns that make us tremble in awe at God, the ones that make us recognize that He's way up there and we are nothing. Even worse than being insignificant, we are sinful and offensive in comparison to His holiness. Do we have this understanding of our place before God? Do we show Him the respect He deserves? In the past, people used to dress up for church. They used to remove their hats in church. They used to kneel when praying rather than sitting. I'm not trying to set up rules or protocol for church, but we need to ask ourselves if in our hearts we truly respect God and understand our place before Him.

From vv. 4-7 *Qohelet* talks about a specific kind of foolish speech before God, which is making vows that one does not keep. Such fools think they can sway God by promising something, as if God needed what we have to offer. But vows before God are solemn and must be made with a right heart. They must be made with an attitude of submission and commitment to God. Do not take your vows lightly. How often do even Christians, when push comes to shove, break their marriage vows of faithfulness, their chastity vows before marriage, their ministry vows, or their vows dedicating to raise their children to love God? All these are indicators of how you see yourself and God. Remember you are dealing with the Creator, the Sovereign, the Almighty God. We must remember that God is our friend, reconciled to us through Jesus, but also that He is the King of the universe. Full understanding of the latter gives us even more appreciation of the former. Let us therefore not forget who God is.