



A Caution to Worshippers

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Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

Solomon's design, in driving us off from the world, by showing us its vanity, is to drive us to God and to our duty, that we may not walk in the way of the world, but by religious rules, nor depend upon the wealth of the world, but on religious advantages; and therefore,

I. He here sends us to *the house of God*, to the place of public worship, to the temple, which he himself had built at a vast expense. When he reflected with regret on all his other works he did not repent of that but reflected on it with pleasure, yet mentions it not, lest he should seem to reflect on it with pride; but he here sends those to it that would know more of the vanity of the world and would find that happiness which is in vain sought for in the creature. David, when he was perplexed, *went into the sanctuary of God*, Ps. 63:17. Let our disappointments in the creature turn our eyes to the Creator; let us have recourse to the word of God's grace and consult that, to the throne of his grace and solicit that. In the word and prayer there is a balm for every wound.

II. He charges us to behave ourselves well there, that we may not miss of our end in coming thither. Religious exercises are not vain things, but, if we mismanage them, they become vain to us. And therefore,

1. We must address ourselves to them with all possible seriousness and care: "*Keep thy foot*, not keep it back from the house of God (as Prov. 25:17), nor go slowly thither, as one unwilling to draw nigh to God, but *look well to thy goings, ponder the path of thy feet*, lest thou take a false step. Address thyself to the worship of God with a solemn pause, and take time to compose thyself for it, not going about it with precipitation, which is called *hasting with the feet*, (Prov. 19:2.) Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering from the work; keep thy affections from running out towards wrong objects, for in the business of God's house there is work enough for the whole man, and all too little to be employed." Some think it alludes to the charge given to

Moses and Joshua to *put off their shoes* (Exod. 3:5, Josh. 5:15,) in token of subjection and reverence. *Keep thy feet clean* (Exod. 30:19.)

2. We must take heed that the sacrifice we bring be not *the sacrifice of fools* (of wicked men), for they are fools and their *sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord* (Prov. 25:8), that we bring not *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*, for we are plainly told that it will not be accepted, and therefore it is folly to bring it,—that we rest not in the sign and ceremony, and the outside of the performance, without regarding the sense and meaning of it, for that is the *sacrifice of fools*. Bodily exercise, if that be all, is a jest; none but fools will think thus to please him who is a Spirit and requires the heart, and they will see their folly when they find what a great deal of pains they have taken to no purpose for want of sincerity. They are *fools*, for they *consider not that they do evil*; they think they are doing God and themselves good service when really they are putting a great affront upon God and a great cheat upon their own souls by their hypocritical devotions. Men may be doing evil even when they profess to be doing good, and even when they do not know it, when they do not consider it. *They know not but to do evil*, so some read it. Wicked minds cannot choose but sin, even in the acts of devotion. Or, they *consider not that they do evil*; they act at a venture, right or wrong, pleasing to God or not, it is all one to them.

3. That we may not bring *the sacrifice of fools*, we must come to God's house with hearts disposed to know and do our duty. We must be *ready to hear*, that is, (1.) We must diligently *attend* to the word of God read and preached. "*Be swift to hear* the exposition which the priests give of the sacrifices, declaring the intent and meaning of them, and do not think it enough to gaze upon what they do, for it must be *a reasonable service*, otherwise it is *the sacrifice of fools*." (2.) We must resolve to comply with the will of God as it is made known to us. *Hearing* is often put for *obeying*, and that is it that is *better than sacrifice*, (1 Sam. 25:22; Isa. 1:15,16) we come in a right frame to holy duties when we come with this upon our heart, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears. Let the word of the Lord come* (said a good man), *and if I had 600 necks I would bow them all to the authority of it*.

4. We must be very cautious and considerate in all our approaches and addresses to God (v. 2): *Be not rash with thy mouth*, in making prayers, or protestations, or promises; *let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*. Note, (1.) When we are in the *house of God*, in solemn assemblies for religious worship, we are in a special manner before God and in his presence, there where he has promised to meet his people, where his eye is upon us and ours ought to be unto him. (2.) We have something to say, something to utter before God, when we *draw nigh to him* in holy duties; he is one *with whom we have to do*, with whom we have business of vast importance. If we come without an errand, we shall go away without any advantage. (3.) What we *utter before God* must come from *the heart*, and therefore we must not be *rash with our mouth*, never let our tongue outrun our thoughts in our devotions; the *words of our mouth*, must always be the product of the *meditation of our hearts*. Thoughts are words to God, and words are but wind if they be not copied from the thoughts. Lip-labour, though ever so well laboured, if that be all, is but lost labour in religion. (Matt. 25:8, 9) (4.) It is not enough that what we say comes from the heart, but it must come from a composed heart, and not from a sudden heat or passion. As the mouth must not be rash, so the heart must not be hasty; we must not only think, but think twice, before we speak, when we are to speak either from God in preaching or to God in prayer, and not utter any thing indecent and undigested.(1 Cor. 24:15)

5. We must be sparing of our words in the presence of God, that is, we must be reverent and deliberate, not talk to God as boldly and carelessly as we do to one another, not speak what comes uppermost, not repeat things over and over, as we do to one another, that what we say may be understood and remembered and may make impression; no, when we speak to God we must consider, (1.) That between him and us there is an infinite distance: *God is in heaven*, where he reigns in glory over us and all the children of men, where he is attended with an innumerable company of holy angels and is *far exalted above all our blessing and praise*. *We are on earth*, the footstool of his throne; we are mean and vile, unlike God, and utterly unworthy to receive any favour from him or to have any communion with him. Therefore we must be very grave, humble, and serious, and be reverent in speaking to him, as we are when we speak to a great man that is much our superior; and, in token of this, *let our words be few*, that they may be *well chosen* (Job 9:14) This does not condemn all long prayers; were they not good, the Pharisees would not have used them for a pretence; Christ prayed all night; and we are directed to *continue in prayer*. But it condemns careless heartless praying, *vain repetitions* (Matt.6:7), repeating *Pater-nosters* by tale. Let us speak to God, and of him, in his own words, words which the scripture teaches; and let our words, words of our own invention, be few, lest, not speaking by rule, we speak amiss. (2.) That the multiplying of words in our devotions will make them *the sacrifices of fools*, v. 3. As confused dreams, frightful and perplexed, and such as disturb the sleep, are an evidence of a hurry of business which fills our head, so many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, are an evidence of folly reigning in the heart, ignorance of and unacquaintedness with both God and ourselves, low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls. Even in common conversation *a fool is known by the multitude of words*; those that know least talk most (Prov. 10:11), particularly in devotion; there, no doubt, *a prating fool shall fall* (Prov. 10:8,10), shall fall short of acceptance. Those are fools indeed who think they *shall be heard*, in prayer, *for their much speaking*.