

BIBLE STUDY NOTE

THE MEANING OF ECCLESIASTES 5:1

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v.1.0

The intent and meaning of Eccl 5:1 is to adhere to the instructions of God. There was no preaching in the Temple and anyway to "listen" means to obey God in the Bible - not as we mean "listen" in modern English which is common knowledge.

One of my favourite commentaries, *Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* says:

>In the word הורות, priests are not perhaps thought of, although the comparison of Ecclesiastes 5:5 (המלאך) with Malachi 2:7 makes it certainly natural; priestly instruction limited itself to information regarding the performance of the law already given in Scripture, Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33:9., and to deciding on questions arising in the region of legal praxis, Deuteronomy 24:8; Haggai 2:11. **The priesthood did not belong to the teaching class in the sense of preaching. Preaching was never a part of the temple cultus, but, for the first time, after the exile became a part of the synagogue worship.** The preachers under the O.T. were the prophets, - preachers by a supernatural divine call, and by the immediate impulse of the Spirit; we know from the Book of Jeremiah that they sometimes went into the temple, or there caused their books of prophecy to be read; yet the author, by the word לשמע of the foregoing proverb, scarcely thinks of them. But apart from the teaching of the priests, which referred to the realization of the letter of the law, and the teaching of the prophets to the realization of the spirit of the law, the word formed an essential part of the sacred worship of the temple: the Tefilla, the Beracha, the singing of psalms, and certainly, at the time of Koheleth, the reading of certain sections of the Bible. When thou goest to the house of God, says Koheleth, take heed to thy step, well reflecting whither thou goest and how thou hast there to appear; and (with this ו he connects with this first nota bene a second) drawing near to hear exceeds the sacrifice-offering of fools, for they are ignorant (just because they hear not), which leads to this result, that they do evil. מן, prae, expresses also, without an adj., precedence in number, Isaiah 10:10, or activity, Isaiah 9:17, or worth, Ezekiel 15:2. קרוב is inf. absol. Btcher seeks to subordinate it as such to שמר: take heed to thy foot ... and to the coming near to hear more than to

But these obj. to שמר would be incongruous, and מתת וגו clumsy and even distorted in expression; it ought rather to be מתתך ככסילים זבח. As the inf. absol. can take the place of the obj., Isaiah 7:15; Isaiah 42:24; Lamentations 3:45, so also the place of the subj.

(Ewald, 240a), although Proverbs 25:27 is a doubtful example of this. That the use of the inf. absol. has a wide application with the author of this book, we have already seen under Ecclesiastes 4:2. Regarding the sequence of ideas in מַתַּת ... זָבַח (first the subj., then the obj.), vid., Gesen. 133. 3, and cf. above at Ecclesiastes 3:18. זָבַח (זִבְחִים), along with its general signification comprehending all animal sacrifices, according to which the altar bears the name זִבְחֵי, early acquired also a more special signification: it denotes, in contradistinction to עֹלָה, such sacrifices as are only partly laid on the altar, and for the most part are devoted to a sacrificial festival, Exodus 18:12 (cf. Exodus 12:27), the so-called shelamim, or also zivhhe shelamim, Proverbs 7:14. The expression זָבַח נָתַן makes it probable that here, particularly, is intended the festival (1 Kings 1:41) connected with this kind of sacrifice, and easily degenerating to worldly merriment (vid., under Proverbs 7:14); for the more common word for נָתַן would have been שָׁחַט or הִקְרִיב; in נָתַן it seems to be indicated that it means not only to present something to God, but also to give at the same time something to man. The most recent canonical Chokma-book agrees with Proverbs 21:3 in this depreciation of sacrifice. But the Chokma does not in this stand alone. **The great word of Samuel, 1 Samuel 15:22., that self-denying obedience to God is better than all sacrifices, echoes through the whole of the Psalms. And the prophets go to the utmost in depreciating the sacrificial cultus.**<

Geneva Study Bible

Keep thy {m} foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of {n} fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

(m) That is, with what affection you come to hear the word of God.

(n) Meaning, of the wicked, who think to please God with common uses, and have neither faith nor repentance.

Wesley's Notes

5:1 Thy foot - Thy thoughts and affections, by which men go to God and walk with him. To hear - To hearken to and obey God's word. Of fools - Such as wicked men use to offer, who vainly think to please God with their **sacrifices without obedience**. For - They are not sensible of the great sinfulness of such thoughts.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

CHAPTER 5

Ec 5:1-20.

1. From vanity connected with kings, he passes to vanities (Ec 5:7) which may be fallen into in serving the King of kings, even by those who, convinced of the vanity of the creature, wish to worship the Creator.

Keep thy foot-In going to worship, go with considerate, circumspect, reverent feeling. The allusion is to the taking off the shoes, or sandals, in entering a temple (Ex 3:5; Jos 5:15, which passages perhaps gave rise to the custom). Weiss needlessly reads, "Keep thy feast days" (Ex 23:14, 17; the three great feasts).

hear-rather, "To be ready (to draw nigh with the desire) to hear (obey) is a better sacrifice than the offering of fools" [Holden]. (Vulgate; Syriac). (Ps 51:16, 17; Pr 21:3; Jer 6:20; 7:21-23; 14:12; Am 5:21-24). The warning is against mere ceremonial self-righteousness, as in Ec 7:12. Obedience is the spirit of the law's requirements (De 10:12). Solomon sorrowfully looks back on his own neglect of this (compare 1Ki 8:63 with Ec 11:4, 6). Positive precepts of God must be kept, but will not stand instead of obedience to His moral precepts. The last provided no sacrifice for wilful sin (Nu 15:30, 31; Heb 10:26-29).

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

5:1-3 Address thyself to the worship of God, and take time to compose thyself for it. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering: keep thy affections from running out toward wrong objects. We should avoid vain repetitions; copious prayers are not here condemned, but those that are unmeaning. How often our wandering thoughts render attendance on Divine ordinances little better than the sacrifice of fools! Many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, show folly in the heart, **low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls.**