

Ecclesiastes 5: 1-3; “Reverencing God in Public Worship”, Sermon # 31 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on October 8th, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We are living in a day when very few people are going to church. So it may seem to us that it is ludicrous to talk about how you ought to worship God, when so many aren't going to church at all. Shouldn't we be thankful if anyone goes to church for any reason at all, and worships God in any way that they please? These verses say no. These verses are saying that there is a right way to worship our great God, and there is a wrong way to worship Him. These verses are saying that God ought to be revered. These verses are telling us that our worship of God is to be engaged in prudently; that is, that we would be wise and holy and careful in our worship of Him. To be prudent means that you are able to “govern and discipline yourself by the use of reason”. It means that you are wise and shrewd in the management of the things that you say and do. At this time we want to look at 3 of the ways that we can reverence God when we go up to His House. The 1st lesson of reverencing God that we will want to remember, is that it is His House that we are coming into, and not our own. The 2nd lesson of reverencing God which we will want to remember is; that when we draw near to Him, it is to hear what He would say to us. And then the 3rd lesson that will want to remember is that our words ought to be carefully chosen.

The 1st Lesson of reverencing God in Public Worship is that you will want to remember that this is His House that you are coming into; not your own.

“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.” Here Solomon calls God’s worship, “going to His House”. There is a very great emphasis in our day, in regard to worship; that it should be something that is very casual; that people should be able to be very comfortable in the presence of God; that you don't really have to be careful about anything you do or say when you come to worship God. In many churches when people come to worship God, there is a spirit of levity (lightness) and joking, and greeting of friends, but there is very little consideration of the fact that they have come to meet with, and worship, the great and awesome God who is holy. This is the very opposite of what the Bible teaches.

The first verse of Chapter 5 proves that many today do not understand what reverent worship is. “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God...” The King James and the American Standard of 1901 say, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God”. The New American Standard Version says, “Guard your steps as you go to the house of God...” Why should you be so careful? Why should you be so thoughtful? Why should you be so serious? You should be so because you are coming into His House, not your own. You are coming into the place where His glory dwells. When you come into your own house, you come into the place that you have made for your own comfort and convenience, and it reflects your taste and your own pleasure, in what you think about life. But when you come into God’s House, you come into the gathered assembly of the saints to render to Him the glory that is due His name. You lay aside your worldly cares and your personal preferences and you come into His Holy Presence in His House.

Turn with me to Psalm 89, verse 5. “And the heavens will praise your wonders, O Lord; your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.” “For who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord?” “Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord?” “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him.” You can see here, that God is not a being who is like ourselves. He is so great that those who realize anything of His holiness; anything of His majesty and power and glory; desire to draw near to Him with reverence and godly fear. They do not waltz into His presence without thinking; they do not come into His presence with their rock and roll band and have a concert in His presence; they do come with joy and with singing; but they come carefully and thoughtfully. This is

because there is no one to compare with Him. He ought to be treated in a wholly different way than the way that we treat our friends, when we meet with them casually. The reverence of God and godly fear are something that make you think about the thoughts and motives that you have for doing the things that you do in relation to Him. The corporate worship of Him in His House (the assembly of His saints) is the greatest of privileges. And this is because He comes in a special way to be present there; present in a way that He is not anywhere else.

You can see this if you will look back to Psalm 87, verse 2. "His foundation is in the holy mountains." "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" Now, the holy mountains, that are spoken of here, are a word picture. They are given to us here in relation to Old Covenant worship which was conducted at Mt. Zion and Mt. Moriah. It was here where worship was set up and conducted by King David, and it is where He made his plans to build the temple. God's foundation is in these holy mountains; these mountains which in New Testament times we can understand as being God's churches; the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ; churches in which His solemn but joyful worship are conducted; churches where His Word is read publicly and declared in the preaching; and where praise and adoration is lifted up to Him. The Lord loves these gates which His New Covenant people enter through to meet with Him from Sunday to Sunday, more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

The dwellings of Jacob represent the family worship and the private worship of the people of God. It is not as though God does not love these too, but He especially loves; He loves more than all; the worship of the gathered church; and that is what He is pleased to choose to bless, more than all other worship, with His Presence and His special spiritual blessings. It is not as though that God is not with His people at all times; He is; in and through the person of the Holy Spirit who dwells in each believer. But again; He loves the gates of Zion (the worship of the gathered church) more than any worship that individual believers offer to Him privately, or anything that they offer in their families when they are apart from the gathered church. This is because the Church is Christ's Bride and His body. And when they are gathered in the name of Christ to worship Him, He is most glorified. If this is so, you can see how important it is that God be treated with great reverence when we come to the House of God.

You must ask yourself as you hear me say these things: Is this is the way that I see God? Is this is my attitude when I come to church to worship the great and holy God? Truly, He blesses the reverent. But whether we know it or not, He does withdraw much of His known and felt Presence from those assemblies of people who are gathering, simply to please themselves. This is a great problem in our day. Many churches and many individual believers have confused the earthly feelings of joy, and happiness, and pleasure, with the real spiritual impressions given by the Holy Spirit. Those who are entertainment-oriented are not really receiving the blessings of the Holy Spirit, but they think that they are; and they assert that they are. But let God's Word be true and every man a liar. It is not so. There is a definite difference, if a person or a church will diligently search for it.

Spiritual blessings are not carnal, or worldly, or self-pleasing blessings. They are distinctively different because they relate to our fellowship and communion with God in our spirit; our spirit with His Spirit; and in conjunction with other believers. If these things are considered, they lead the people in that church to look outside of themselves to find the reality of Who God is. That church will deliberately seek and plan for a reverent worship; a worship where God is sought, for Himself; to know Him in accordance with how He has revealed Himself in His Word. It is only those persons who come seeking to truly experience the beauty of holiness in worship, who will find the true joy which He gives. And they will find it there, in the sanctuary; they will find the presence of the true and living God. His special Presence and blessing are not to be found to any great extent in a rock concert atmosphere, no matter what anyone says or asserts. The feelings there felt and expressed are felt in response to a fleshly

stimulus; the rock music. All of that may be fun, but God is not in it to any great extent or measure.

What! Does the infinitely pure, and holy, and majestic God have to be dragged to our rock concerts so that He can find pleasure in it? God's eyes are in every place, watching the evil and the good. But will He really dwell with those who are only pursuing their own fleshly and earthly happiness? Is He really imparting to them the richest and purest blessings of the Spirit and His Word? I think not! I believe that this generation that we live in now have accepted a counterfeit worship. They have substituted what is purely earthly fun for that which is spiritually and eternally pleasing to God. Churches which have engaged in these forms of worship should repent of them and be ashamed of themselves. I am not suggesting that stringed instruments cannot be used in the music of the sanctuary. What I am objecting to is the rock-concert atmosphere which I believe is destructive to reverence. I have seen guitars used reverently in worship, but the tendency and temptation is for it to degenerate over time, into the concert and performance mentality where the music becomes the reason that people have come to worship God in that particular place; not so much the truth of God's Word. Eventually the drums and the large speakers and the big-screened TVs come in, and then worship degenerates into carnal fun. Let us do our best to preserve a simple and reverence worship to the Lord our God in our services of worship. Let us hold the hymn books and the Psalters in our hands and let us hold God in reverence by the ways that we worship Him.

Now then, the 2nd lesson of reverencing God which we want to remember is; that when we draw near to Him, it is to hear what He would say to us.

Verse 1 says, "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil." "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God." "For God is in heaven, and you on earth." "Therefore let your words be few." Here we find a contrast being made here, between those who come to church to hear God's Word and to receive it with a view to doing it; and the sacrifice of fools; those who are those who do not come to church primarily to hear, but to speak their own mind. It is true that we come to God for the very reason of giving Him words of praise. We come to give Him our praise and to speak words to Him in prayer. But there is a decided difference between the righteous man and the fool in this regard. The righteous man comes to church because he wants God to speak to him through the preaching of His word. In this sense, he has a listening heart. The fool comes with his mind already made up on many of the issues of life, and he is full of his own opinions and thoughts when he comes to church. When he comes to church, it is often so that he might justify himself before God and judge other men. He comes not to hear and listen, but to judge. He believes that he is smarter than godly men and wiser than the preacher of the Word of God. But the righteous man is humble and would be taught.

Our God would have us to be careful and thoughtful of how we listen and how we hear. Look over at Psalm 85, verse 8. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly." "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land." You see, if we are hearing what God the Lord would say to us, we would be people who are coming to listen and to receive the truth of what He would have us do. We would not be full of judgments upon it. God speaks peace to His people who fear Him and saves those who are humble and contrite before Him. We will do well if we will remember that our obedience and our worship should not be a matter of what other people have made up concerning how God is to be worshiped; God is to be worshiped according to His Word, or it is will-worship to him.

Proverbs 30, verses 5 and 6 say, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him." "Do not add to his words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." Those who add to God's Word are guilty of will-worship; wanting to have a religion of their own

making. Colossians 2: 18 and 23 are also good verses to remember. "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." Verse 23 says, "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion (that is will worship), false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." You see, for some people, the practice of religion is something that becomes a matter of their own thoughts and their own their will. It is not God's will, however, that they are fulfilling. Rather it is their own will that is being done, and this is what leads to false worship. It is the sacrifice of fools. If we worship Him according to what people think should be done; according to their own tastes or what is popular in our culture or our society, we have not understood what He is looking for from us. Our God is above all human traditions and culture. He wants to speak to us in and through our worship of Him. Our worship is to be given to God in the way that God has commanded that it should be rendered to Him; in the way that He proscribes in His Word. It is a matter of our knowing His will; what He has said in His Word, and then doing it accordingly; even when it is unpopular. The question then comes: What is God looking for, from us then, when we come to worship Him?

Well, 3rd, when we come to church, we should understand, that if we would reverence God, our words ought to be carefully chosen.

Verse 2 says, "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God." "For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few." "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words." Two things are commanded here if we would be wise and reverent in worship. Do not be rash or hasty with your words. And let your words be few. Why? Because God is in heaven and you are on earth. It is your position before God which you should consider. He is ruling and reigning, in righteousness, in heaven. He is holy and majestic; all wise and discerning. You are not. Why should you speak to Him before you think about it? Think about what Proverbs 29, verse 20 says: "Do you see a man hasty in his words?" "There is more hope for a fool than for him." Oh, what a great need is there for us to think about the things that we say in the presence of God in worship, in the secret recesses of our heart. Many rash words need to be guarded against. Think before you speak.

And then, if you would also turn with me to Proverbs 17: 27. "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit." "Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive." The person who is a knowing person, a wise person, spares his words; especially in the presence of God; his great Lord and King. He could say more, but he does not because He is looking for the approval of God rather than of men. A person who is trusting in God usually does not need to say much. He knows that God knows his heart, and he knows that that is enough. "A fool's voice is known by his many words." And conversely, a person who is a person of few words, even if he is a fool will be considered wise and perceptive if he shuts his lips. There are many good reasons when we come to worship God, to be careful in our words and the attitude of our hearts. "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight; O Lord my strength and my Redeemer." I hope that this study will move you to walk prudently when go to the house of God.