

Ecclesiastes 5:1–20 – Reverence, Contentment, and the Vanity of Wealth

Introduction

This chapter of Ecclesiastes contrasts two major areas of life: worship and wealth. Solomon warns against empty religion on one hand, and the futility of chasing riches on the other. Both are common snares: people either misuse worship to soothe their conscience while living for themselves, or they chase after wealth believing it will bring security. Solomon shows us that both approaches fail, and instead he calls us to live with reverence before God and to receive life's blessings as gifts from His hand.

1. Worship Without Reverence (Ecclesiastes 5:1–7)

“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.” (v. 1, NKJV)

When entering God's presence, the priority is to listen rather than to speak. Rash words and impulsive promises reveal a shallow understanding of God's holiness. Solomon warns against making vows lightly:

- *“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed.” (v. 4)*
- *“Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” (v. 5)*

The lesson is clear: God takes our words seriously, even when we do not. Promising Him devotion or obedience to ease guilt but failing to follow through is dishonoring to Him. Reverence means listening carefully, speaking cautiously, and keeping our commitments faithfully.

Practical Application:

Many today treat worship as casual, almost entertainment. Yet Scripture calls us to approach God with reverence. When we pray or sing, do we mean what we say? Instead of making lofty promises, it is better to cultivate a heart that listens and obeys in simple faithfulness. Reverence does not silence joy—it deepens it, grounding our worship in sincerity.

2. Injustice and the God Who Rules Above (Ecclesiastes 5:8–9)

“If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.” (vv. 8–9)

Oppression and corruption are part of life *“under the sun.”* Solomon reminds us that earthly systems are imperfect because men are imperfect. But above every level of human authority stands the God who sees and rules. Injustice should not shake our faith; rather, it should cause us to look higher, trusting that God will hold all rulers accountable.

Practical Application:

When news headlines are filled with corruption, it is easy to despair. Yet Scripture assures us that God is not blind or indifferent. As believers, we should work for justice where we can, but without forgetting that ultimate justice rests with Him. This truth steadies our hearts and keeps us from bitterness.

3. The Vanity of Wealth (Ecclesiastes 5:10–17)

“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.” (v. 10)

Solomon, the wealthiest king of his time, writes from experience: money never satisfies. The more one has, the more one spends (v. 11). The rich often lose sleep worrying over how to protect or multiply their possessions, while the laborer sleeps soundly after an honest day’s work (v. 12). Worse still, riches can be lost through misfortune, leaving nothing for one’s children (vv. 13–14). And at death, all wealth must be left behind (vv. 15–16).

The relentless pursuit of wealth results in *“all his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.”* (v. 17) In other words, it promises joy but produces emptiness.

Practical Application:

In a culture that measures success by possessions, we must remember Jesus’ words: *“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”* (Luke 12:15). Are we living for what will outlast us? Earthly riches vanish, but investing in eternal treasures—through generosity, service, and obedience—secures what moth and rust cannot destroy.

4. The Gift of Contentment (Ecclesiastes 5:18–20)

“Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.” (v. 18)

Life is not about amassing wealth but about receiving what God provides with thankfulness. To enjoy food, drink, work, and the fruit of labor is not sinful—it is a gift from God. True contentment comes not from riches but from recognizing God as the Giver.

“As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.” (v. 19)

Notice that wealth itself is not condemned—it is the love of wealth that corrupts (1 Timothy 6:10). When possessions are enjoyed humbly and thankfully, they become occasions for worship.

Practical Application:

Instead of chasing after “more,” ask: *Am I thankful for what I already have?* Contentment is not complacency; it is freedom from the restless craving for more. Gratitude transforms ordinary meals, daily work, and small blessings into reminders of God’s kindness. When we enjoy life with a heart of thanksgiving, we live with a joy that money can never buy.

Conclusion

Ecclesiastes 5 confronts two illusions:

1. That we can approach God casually without reverence.
2. That wealth can secure lasting satisfaction.

Both are lies. True joy and peace come only from walking reverently with God and receiving life's portion as His gift. Worship Him sincerely, live justly under His rule, and be content with what He has given. This is the path of wisdom.

Personal Reflection Questions:

- Do I approach God with reverence, or have I grown casual and careless in worship?
- Have I made promises to God I have not kept? What steps can I take to honor Him in obedience rather than empty words?
- Am I content with what God has given me today, or am I restless for more?
- How can I shift my focus from earthly treasures to eternal ones?