

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Eleven)

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Given 11-Jan-14; Sermon #1193

When the previous sermon in this series of Ecclesiastes ended, we were about to begin chapter 5, and thus we have completed one-third of the book of Ecclesiastes. We are going to be moving a little bit faster (at least I thought this way as I was preparing), because the foundation for the entire book has been laid, and Solomon is now exploring important details.

I am going to review a bit, and first I want to review part of the foundation of this series. I believe that it is helpful to remember four points in an overview. Three I gave early in this series, and a fourth I recently became aware of.

Point Number One: Ecclesiastes contains no direct prophecies, but it is frequently implying them. In other words, you can read into what he is saying, but it contains no direct prophecies.

Point Number Two: It does not present Christ as Savior; thus, it is not dealing with this “what you must do to be saved” issues. If you get the point, he assumes that those to whom this is directed are already under the blood of Christ.

Point Number Three: It contains no “Thus saith the LORD” commands from on high. And thus, like the “no prophecies” issue, it is *implying* “This is what you must do.”

Point Number Four: Satan is never mentioned, or, as far as I am aware, never even alluded to in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a writing concerned almost entirely with personal responsibility before God in the matters of daily life within God’s purpose. In that case, it is invaluable to daily life in a practical way. Ecclesiastes is all about quality-of-life issues.

The Preacher (and that is what Ecclesiastes means) helps us to set and follow guidelines of daily importance so our life is not meaningless. This is because all through the book Solomon is helping us analyze which choices are better. He does this largely by means of frank, but thoughtful comparisons, and thus, for the Christian, life comes down to one singularly important question: How shall I make the best day-by-day use of my calling? Solomon does not give us direct answers. Instead, by means of his comparison, he gives us just enough information to give guidance, but he leaves the choices to us.

I think that we have learned from our personal experiences that life is not only merely difficult, it is very much like a convoluted labyrinth. Following the correct path by making right choices is not always easily discerned. You know that from your own experience. It often requires thoughtful considerations, and it almost always requires some measure of faith.

Each section of Ecclesiastes we have completed to this point has presented us with overall perspectives to give us guidelines regarding principles to live by that are very helpful. For example, the introduction in the first chapter clearly defines the apparent meaninglessness of human life “under the sun.” Everybody born faces what God clearly exposes in this chapter.

There are two helpful clues. The first clue—“under the sun”—indicates a life lived. No matter how full and productive it may appear to casual observation, it is a life lived with little thought of God and His purpose for His creation. Even though Solomon does not say it, the lesson is: “Avoid this.” “If you want your life to be meaningful, avoid this.” God must be included.

The second clue is to note that I said “*apparent* meaninglessness.” Life is in no way meaninglessness to those called of God. It *appears* meaninglessness to casual observation because God has not yet opened the minds of the vast majority to remove the spiritual blindness absorbed from this world; and thus, to the “uncalled,” life then appears to have no purposeful direction because the same general events repetitiously occur throughout history regardless of when and where one lives. It is as though human life is being lived like a hamster on a treadmill.

In other words, there is endless activity and movement, but one gets nowhere. Thus, an important overall conclusion is that Ecclesiastes gives important guidelines and provides direction to *the called*. That is Ecclesiastes’ purpose. We figure that out by analysis of what Solomon gives to us. It is directed to “the called of God” in order that life is lived purposefully and moving toward the goal that God has revealed, and thus Ecclesiastes is especially written for the benefit of “the called.”

Chapter 2 begins focusing on elements of life’s importance to God’s purpose which God is revealing to those called. In this chapter Solomon addresses work, pleasure, and entertainment, and within each subject he evaluates, making comparisons regarding what is wise and what is of lesser value.

In chapter 2 Solomon gives his first indication that “contentment with God’s gifts” as

being important to the life of “the called.” The lesson: Do not let your mind wander to what we do *not* have. Be positively thankful for what we *do* have, and what we *do* have is God’s calling and knowledge of His purpose, and that is a **huge** gift—invaluable. Incidentally, I will tell you before we ever get there, he keeps returning to this thing about contentment. Do you know why? Because contentment keeps you from coveting, and other things as well. Discontent is very hard on life.

Chapter 3 is of vital importance to “the called” because it inserts God into the flow of life in a major, major way. Chapter 3 shows Him sovereignly initiating, directing, and judging events in the lives of “the called.” God provides events. This is in chapter three. I will call them exercises helpful toward the preparation for His Kingdom. Chapter 3 is tremendously encouraging. We are not alone. God is personally and deeply involved to provide help toward the purpose that He is directing us toward. The big lesson here is *personal* involvement. That purpose involves eternity, and thus life has a very definite point toward which it is being drawn, and choosing to get in harmony with it is the urging of this chapter. He is revealed as being deeply involved in the timing of both the beginning and the ending of the events of our life.

Chapter 4 brings us back from the great teachings of chapter 3 to the corrupt world that we live and move about in, and he reminds us of the unjust courts and the oppression of life in this system. But he also reminds us that God is judging. It is a continuous operation. The lesson: Do not allow yourself to get overwrought about this crazy world that we live in. Stay focused. (We will get more of that as we move through these next couple of chapters.)

In chapter 4 he also compares work attitudes. Work is very important to the called of God. He compares work attitudes so that we might examine our own, and make choices of those attitudes that produce the most toward the Kingdom of God. He briefly examines the work-a-holic, the lazy-bones, the balanced man, and the miser. In that same chapter he also touches on the value of companionship, cooperation within partnerships, and he admonishes us briefly regarding pride—(“Watch out for it”)—and the instability of life, and the fickleness of the public.

In addition, he again also strongly implies that making the choice to be content is a necessary quality. We got two chapters, and he got back to contentment again. Thus, Solomon is clearly analyzing many of life’s experiences and describing them in such a way as to make clear what the better choices are. I will have to admit that the language he uses is not something that we are familiar with, but when we think on it, God helps us to understand what he is saying.

Again, a reminder: Solomon leaves the decisions to us, but he gives us enough information that, if we are serious about pleasing and glorifying God, we will choose “this” rather than “that.”

Let us go to Ecclesiastes chapter 5.

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. 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. 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—better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

To those of us who are called, who are “*the* called of God,” there is nobody more important to us than God Himself. That should be so self-evident, because to us God is a reality. He is a *family* reality. We are part of His family. We are not like those Solomon describes in chapter one—those to whom life is essentially meaninglessness.

By this I do not mean the uncalled have no goals in life. I do not mean that they do not plan what they are going to do with their time. I do not mean that they are not buying and selling. I do not mean they are not repairing their homes, going to games or to theaters, or buying the latest fashions.

Daniel’s remark about people “running to and fro” is a hallmark of Satan’s world. “To and fro” pictures activity without purposeful direction in alignment with God’s purpose. That part is important. Without alignment with God’s purpose, the uncalled are quite busy having families, getting married, getting divorced, taking vacations, repairing their automobile, getting up in the morning to go to work, returning home at night to a dinner, to read a book, or to watch television; but God is not an ever-present mindful reality to the overwhelming majority of them the way that He should be to us, because we believe Him, and we have faith in Him. They may even have an awareness of Him, and concern regarding Him and their makeup, but their worldview is not formed and shaped with God and His purpose as their central focus, and what He thinks and works on, and His

planning is not a guiding overriding concern to them.

Recall briefly now what God demanded of Moses when *he* entered God's presence, and mentally compare the thoughtlessness of Ananias and Sapphira about what was seen in them.

We are going to go back to Exodus 3:5. I am not going to expound on this at all, but He says there that He is God, and then He said to Moses, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Kind of tuck that into your mind.

Now we will go to the book of Acts, chapter 5, and compare the Moses example with Ananias and Sapphira and see what we can learn.

Acts 5:1-2 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds . . .

Acts 5:5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

Acts 5:7-8 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

Acts 5:9-10 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.

I just put that in there to show you a couple of attitudes.

I want you to recall right now how in Ecclesiastes 4 Solomon visited a courtroom and came away discouraged about what he saw. Then he went to a marketplace and observed four different workers and the way that they applied their trade. Then he commented on partnership, the stability of civic life, and all the while he was evaluating

the uncalled. But in chapter 5, verses 1 through 7, he visits the House of God—the Temple.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 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.

In chapter 4 he was constantly coming in contact with the uncalled—those who did not have God as a part of their operating procedure, but in chapter 5 it directly says there in verse 1 that he went to the House of God—to the Temple. It seems that his concern is whether the worshippers are truly worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

Have you ever seen a TV program or a movie in which the story takes place on a Sunday morning, and the family is grumbling while getting dressed for Sunday church services, and they are arguing with each other about what they will or will not wear? They continue onto services in the family car, wrapped in their own thoughts or bickering about things that irritate them. Then as soon as they exit their car and enter at the sanctuary door, a broad smile creases their faces, and they are polite and kind to all that they greet. And then when they sing a hymn, their eyes are reverently closed, and on their face is a look of rapture as though they were about to be transported off to heaven itself. Then services are over, and it is out the door and back to the “dog-eat-dog” real world, and behavior and attitudes return to normal.

Now all of this within the movie or TV show is of course a huge exaggeration, but it is done to make clear that attitudes and conduct can be flicked on or off depending upon who it is that one wants to impress. This flicking on and off regarding God is the very kind of behavior and attitude that is Solomon’s concern as we begin chapter 5. Now why? Well, as we will see, the way these people are acting indicates an unresolved hypocrisy.

There is no doubt that Solomon observed people he deemed were not all consistently and faithfully sincere regarding God in relation to their life. Their worship of God was confined to their appearance at church services, but what about the rest of life?

It is very interesting that each of the analyses that Solomon addressed in chapter 4 involved an aspect of daily life. Whether the subject involved the courts, the manner in which the worker addressed his labors, a partnership, or civic life of public service, there was never in chapter 4 a single mention of God in his interview of these people.

Where does God fit into the lives of those that Solomon observed as we begin chapter 5? First of all, he observes them going to services, or *at* services. It is interesting that in the New King James Version, chapter 5, verse 1 begins with the words, "Deal prudently when you go to the house of God." The KJV begins by stating, "Keep your foot when you go to the house of God." The word "prudently" indicates "be careful." "Keep your foot" can just as easily be translated as "Watch your step." That too is a warning to be careful.

Following the previous chapter in which there is not even the slightest implication of God, this first verse can be understood as a warning to be careful that God is not overlooked or even left out of one's life entirely, or it can be taken in a more positive sense to mean to make sure that one follows through on one's part by keeping God actively involved in one's life because one has given Him the solemn promise of always submitting to His way following baptism. Serving Him, worshipping Him, is what we are converted to do in life.

Luke 14:26-27 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Here is where we have to count the cost before committing ourselves, and our life therefore to Jesus Christ. We must count the cost before being baptized. We are admonished to do this, because in order for God's purpose to be fulfilled, we must strive to put Him first in our life.

Now, was the spiritual condition of the subjects of Ecclesiastes 5 such that they were robbing God of a reverence, the honor and respect that He deserves, or were the acts rather perfunctory, insincere, and hypocritical? This provides us with a clue as to why this mention of the House of God, because that little phrase connects these people directly to God.

What Solomon admonishes here is not directed toward those who have *no* relationship with God whatever, as in chapter 4, but toward those who *do* have a relationship with Him and have good intentions, but whose minds wander easily and thus find it hard to keep focused to give full attention following through with Him in daily life.

So chapter 5 is addressed directly to you and to me. We really have to evaluate ourselves as we go through this chapter. What we are looking at here is a gentle

reminder to “the called of God” that *in our life everything matters*. To help drive this thought home, notice that in verse 1 this is directed toward those drawing *near* to God, but who give the sacrifice of fools. This is going to be serious business.

“Drawing near” focuses on those who *do* have a relationship with God, and are thus doing something about that relationship, and that aspect is good. They are at least doing something. They are going to church. It shows a good intention. The word “sacrifice” indicates something given in the behalf of another. For example, Jesus Christ sacrificed His life in *our* behalf.

The focus here though is on a *foolish* sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifices were not foolish. These sacrifices are not merely foolish, because Solomon immediately elevates them to something that is on a more serious level: “evil” he says. Thus what these people do, who have a relationship with God, is they are making a sacrifice in going to Temple services, but they are doing something more dangerous than they seem to understand.

English synonyms for the underlying Hebrew term translated “evil” is “bad” or “wickedness.” Either one could be used; “bad” as a modifier, and “wickedness” as a noun. *Strong’s Concordance* adds that this term combines both the deed and its consequences. It further states that it indicates injury to both the perpetrator and those around him. Thus Solomon is indicating that whatever these described persons are doing does *nobody* any good.

Let us look at the advice Solomon gives, because it gives insight into the evil these people were committing. In Ecclesiastes 5:1, he says, “Draw near to hear.” In verse 2 he advises, “Do not be rash with your mouth,” and then in verse 2, “Do not let your heart utter anything hastily before God.” Then again, in verse 2, he says, “Let your words be few.” In verse 3 he says, “A fool’s voice is known by his many words.” And then back to verse 2 again, he counsels, “Be humble, because you are on earth, and God is in heaven.” Thus we get a picture that whatever they are doing is more serious than they imagine. He says they do not understand.

The first counsel that he gives regards hearing. We are going to go to the New Testament to the book of Matthew to chapter 13, the parables chapter.

Matthew 13:8-9 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

We are making a connection with Ecclesiastes 5.

Matthew 13:41-43 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

The first command in verses 8 and 9 here lies in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. The second command in verses 41-43 is in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. Both though have the same urgent sense. The instruction in the Sower and the Seed is quite clear regarding hearing. Now consider these factors that Jesus said. Factor 1: The seed is the Word of God; therefore, what the Sower cast was good, and the human soil the seed fell upon was also good. But there was still one factor beyond the Sower's power. The soil—that is the human the seed fell upon—had the power to accept or reject whether the seed took root depending upon whether he had chosen to listen. It is the choice that the individual makes that is the all-important point in this parable.

The same principle is true in verse 43 regarding hearing the truth of the Lake of Fire or the Kingdom of God, and therefore Jesus is teaching us that we (the soil) have the power to completely shut off hearing through the Word of God even though the Word of God is literally heard and God also calls. He makes very clear it is our responsibility to hear, think upon, accept, or reject. God is not going to overpower us if we do not want it, and we show it by turning off the hearing.

We are beginning to get around to how important Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 is once we know that we have the power to shut God out of our life even though He called. That is serious business.

We are going to go to the book of Mark, chapter 4. We are beginning to see distant elements of why these people, said by Solomon, do not understand. They do not get it.

Mark 4:18-19 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Mark 4:21-23 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret

but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

This is all connected throughout this lesson here in Mark 4. All those verses are connected. This is Mark’s version of the same parable that we saw in Matthew 13, but Mark adds something regarding “hearing” that is important to us, and thus he expands the lesson that was given first in Matthew 13. The thorns, the cares, and the riches symbolize distractions beyond the initial calling, and thus they involve things heard and seen in the world.

So what is the lesson? Not only must we first consciously turn on our hearing at the beginning of our calling, we must also selectively choose from amongst all that we hear from the world, and accept or reject. In other words, we must discipline ourselves to be selective.

Now why are these elements in our conversion so important? Let us turn to Romans 10.

Romans 10:17-19 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.”

I insert these verses because I want all of us to be impressed, that “hearing”—hearing God, hearing His Word—may very well be, in an overall sense, our *highest* responsibility in our relationship with God, because we *must* live by faith, and faith begins, is expanded and sustained, by hearing. We can turn God off at any time from the beginning of our calling, and all through our time growing and overcoming. If we properly understand how Christ uses the term “hearing,” we should be hearing God even as we read His Word and no audible sound whatever is involved. And so a conclusion at this point: Brethren, **“hearing” is serious business**. That is the first thing Solomon addresses. Number one on the “hit” list.

Let us move on, regarding speaking. We will go back to the Old Testament again, to Proverbs 10:19.

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 17:27 He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.

Now back to the New Testament to the book of James.

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

These well-known scriptures are two from each Testament to keep things balanced. They say essentially the same thing, and there are more that touch less directly than these on the subject here in Ecclesiastes 5. Overall, there are so many verses that give similar counsel regarding speaking one cannot help but understand the importance God places on being very careful about what we allow to come into our ears and what comes out of our mouth.

There is one more though regarding what comes out of our mouth that we are going to look at, because this kind of puts a cap on it. It is in the New Testament, and it is in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 12:35-37 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Speaking of the major aspect of one's character by providing a crystal-clear window into our heart, a proverb that is attributed to Abraham Lincoln is appropriate here. He said, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt."

What sets Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 apart of all of these other verses touching on speaking is that the others are seen simply as good advice or relationships in general, but these verses in Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 containing the counsel Solomon gives are seen directly within a relationship with God Himself. So this is pretty pointed. What is it we talk about

when we are before God?

Let us first clarify something regarding being before God. Solomon directly says that we must not forget that God is in heaven and we are on earth. This implies the greatness of His sovereignty, but he also mentions going to the *House* of God. This implies a specific place and *time* that one is before God. So is Solomon's main concern for us here on God's sovereignty or on the specific place? I believe, since the unspoken but under-arching theme going all through Ecclesiastes is that everything matters in life, that Solomon's main concern here is a gentle reminder that we are *always* before God.

I do not believe that the main issue regarding this counsel from Solomon is the *amount* of words said (though he does caution us to be neither rash nor hasty and therefore to let our words be few), but rather the main thrust of his counsel lies in verses 4 through 7, and his concern is whether we follow through and keep our promises regardless of when or where or to whom the promises are made, because all of them are made before God.

The major sin of his concern here, though it is not directly stated, is ultimately the matter of hypocrisy in the whole context, and hypocrisy is a matter of misrepresentation of who and what we really are. I do not believe his concern is *deliberate* hypocrisy, but rather a matter of forgetfulness and carelessness as expressed in our lives.

In other words, we cannot allow ourselves to ever let slip from our minds who we are and whom we represent. It is a matter of not being as disciplined and focused as we need to be; that is, being focused to the proper use of faith. Do we ever let our hair down? Is it possible that the hypocrisy happens because we are not as zealous as we need to be?

Notice this string of clues that he gives, using terms that reveal undisciplined carelessness is at the root of the problem, and thus triggers one to the sin of hypocrisy which one falls into without effort.

He uses the word "fools" three times; "rash"; "hastily"; "Do not let your mouth cause." You see, it is something within our control if we will exercise our mouth. "Do not delay"—(a procrastinator); "error," "excuse," "words be few."

Thus, overall he gives a picture of a person of an undisciplined mind who goes about doing whatever amuses him at the time without giving thought to the effects of what he or she is saying, and then later gets caught and exposed by, as he says, "the messenger of God."

Let us go back to the book of I Peter and read what Peter says is good advice for us at all times. The first line, in a way, says it all.

I Peter 1:13-15 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Now to the book of James. We previously read verse 19 of James 1, now we are going to go to verse 22. Remember, in James 1:19 he said, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."

James 1:22-26 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

The answer to the problem that is being expressed and looked at in Ecclesiastes 5 is that we must gird up the loins of our mind and be sober, to be a disciplined *doer*. Those things are clear advice, and sometimes, brethren, it is so easy for *who and what we are* to slip from our mind, that we made a covenant with God, and in return for our pledge to Him in that covenant, gave Him our life as a living sacrifice. You do not want to be a person making a sacrifice of fools, and that pledge—our holy promise to Him—that if He will forgive our sins on the basis of our faith in Christ's sacrifice, we in turn will devote our life in service to Him; thus we must keep our wits about us, because though God is merciful, everything should matter to us.

He mentioned back there in Ecclesiastes 5—"the messenger of God." Who is that? Well, the messenger of God mentioned there is anybody, or any circumstance, that triggers the revelation in our mind that we have sinned or are continuing in sin. Sometimes God brings it to mind, and so that thought is the messenger from God. Sometimes He sends somebody to correct us. That person is a messenger of God.

So God, in His mercy, sends or brings factors together so that we know, understand, and analyze that we are doing something we ought not to do, and that is the messenger of God. Thus, Solomon is showing us that God is faithful to bring the knowledge of our sin to mind, and very often God does it quite gently, but that still brings to us a measure of disappointment.

Back now to Ecclesiastes 5. I want to read verse 7 again.

Ecclesiastes 5:7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.

In verse 7, in order to properly fit within the context of the whole seven verses there, the term “dreams” is not being used to indicate the random mental activity one has while sleeping and over which one has little or no control. Dreams just pop into the mind and there they are. Rather “dreams” indicates the *wandering* of the mind one has while seemingly fully awake. In other words, brethren, daydreams. And for the most part, daydreams are nothing but sheer vanity. They are time-wasting drifts of the mind that lead nowhere positive, and while involved in them we are not focused and disciplined. Our mind is off somewhere, and so daydreams are nothing but vanity, and this is exactly the opposite of what God desires of us.

There is something else here of interest. We are now almost halfway through Ecclesiastes, and this verse contains both the major thought that the book began with—(vanity; “vanity of vanities”)—and the thought or goal that the book ends with.

Verse 7 says, “Fear God.” And the book ends with, “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.” So halfway through the book Solomon is directly saying what the urgent aim of every life needs to be. We need to proceed from “vanity of vanities”—the meaninglessness of an “under the sun” life—to the fulfillment of life’s purpose through fearing—reverently respecting God as shown through an “over the sun” life. The way to get and to stay focused is encapsulated in these first seven verses. Here they are:

Number 1: Do not just hear God, listen to Him carefully with focused attention, with the mind engaged, not drifting in daydreams.

Number 2: Speak with a matching level of focused attention. The kind of attention we should give to hearing should also be given to speaking.

Number 3: Follow through in obedience to what we vowed when we committed ourselves when making the covenant.

Incidentally, I happened to think why I put that thing about Moses in there, and also about Ananias and Sapphira. It was because there were two contrasting opposites there. What I wanted us to see was this: What kind of attention and respect and wholly consumed attitude did God demand of Moses? "Take off your sandals, Moses. You are on holy ground." We go into God's presence reverently, respectfully, knowing that He is holy, and He is our Father, and He demands that respect.

On the other hand, as far as we know, in a sense the way we look at it in the Old Testament situation, Moses was not even converted. Do you understand? He had not gone through the same thing as we go through in the conversion process. Now he may literally have been, but until that time we do not know that, but God demanded this of this man that He had chosen to be His servant, and that is the kind of position all of us are in.

We have been chosen to be God's servants as well as part of His family, and He demands respect of us. Now, we are finding out that He demands that respect, and that we never forget that He is above, and that we are below. We are giving Him the honor and respect with our life that He deserves to have, and so He wants our minds disciplined, in gear. He is merciful, and He understands that we cannot be that way all the time, but He has set the bar so high.

Now Ananias and Sapphira, according to the story, were already converted, and what was Peter's comment to them? Basically, what he said was, "Don't you realize that you lied to the Holy Spirit, that you are in His presence, and that you lied?" They were at the other end of this continuum, and they were members. Can you begin to see why Solomon is so serious about this "Listen," this "Speak"? We are always in God's presence. That is something we need to be striving for.

Back now to Ecclesiastes 5. We are going to read verses 8 through 12.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-12 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. He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see

them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

This will at first seem like a digression, but it is not really. There is a tension that can be fairly serious that accompanies the subjects of “hearing” and “speaking” in God’s presence because of the realization in our minds of their importance, and though we may not think of it all the time, we understand that, for our own good, God demands our highest allegiance.

We willingly accept that because we believe the gospel, knowing who He is, and what He is offering us. But being human we are sometimes easily distracted. There are times that we would rather do almost anything short of an outright sin than listen to what God has to say. Notice this example. It is one that you are quite familiar with, and again it comes out of the book of Matthew. This series of verses in a way is not often used for what I am going to use it here.

Matthew 19:21-27 Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?”

I am not going to go into this deeply, but will use only one of the principles contained within this as an example.

First: The rich young man was clearly, by his answer, preoccupied by his material wealth and social power to such an extent that he really did not *hear* that what Christ was offering him was eternal life. Now think how the vast difference in value is between eternal life and his then-present wealth. He badly misjudged, because he really did not listen.

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Second: Anything of this earth that we hold to be of great value to us has the power to influence us not to hear, just like this rich young ruler. The power of this valuable thing to us lies in our fear of losing it.

What we need to understand is that it does not have to be money—wealth. It is merely something that is so valuable to us we cannot give it up.

Third: Regardless of the greatness of the distraction that occurs by what we hold valuable and therefore distracting, God stands ready to save us from it.